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Interview with the President of the Association des mines d'amiante du Québec

Jean Dupéré, President of Lac d'amiante du Québec, Ltée, is the new President of the Association des mines d'amiante du Québec. At the beginning of his mandate, he assesses the current situation and the future of the asbestos industry.

• 1981 saw another substantial drop in deliveries of asbestos fibre. What have been the immediate consequences for the industry and for Québec producers in particular?

The fact that less fibre than anticipated was delivered this year has caused a large accumulation of stock throughout the mining industry, leading naturally to sharper price competition on the international markets. As a result of the stock accumulation, Québec producers have been forced to cut back on production. In practical terms, this means prolonged plant shutdowns and an unprecedented unemployment rate in the Québec asbestos region.

• What are the major factors accounting for this drop in the demand for asbestos fibre?

The main cause of this drop is undoubtedly the economic recession which has seriously affected two major sectors of the economy, the construction and auto industries, the largest market outlets for asbestos fibre.

However, there are admittedly other factors involved in this fall in demand, although it is for the moment difficult to measure to what extent. Adverse publicity and proposed regulations aimed at restricting the use of asbestos continue to foster research into substitute products.



• There has been a geographical shift in the asbestos markets in the last few years. Was this any more noticeable in 1981?

The trend became stronger in 1981 and I think that it will continue to do so in coming years. The traditional asbestos markets in Europe and North America are at best stable, and some are even regressing. Consequently, the marketing efforts of producers are now directed at developing countries whose needs, in particular for asbestos-cement, are increasing.

• Is the producing industry in Québec and Canada in a position to benefit from the market expansion in developing countries?

Even at first glance, it is obvious that international competition on these markets is becoming increasingly fierce. The industry in Québec and Canada must therefore become competitive if it is to take proper advantage of these markets.

At the outset, we have the advantage of being able to offer an excellent product and a reliable source of supply.

Interview with the President of the AMAQ

However, this advantage must be weighed against the fact that our production and shipping costs are generally higher than those of certain rival nations. This is particularly the case with the USSR and Zimbabwe, whose economic structure or standard of living are quite different from our own, while they are often favoured by geographical proximity.

These factors present certain challenges to us, but they can be overcome through improved productivity and a stable and harmonious working climate.

On the other hand, the buyer countries, who cannot afford interruptions in the flow of supplies and who also want to avoid dependence on a single source, are anxious to diversify their suppliers, which is a point in our favour, given our great capacity for supplying these markets on a reliable and continuing basis.

• In any case, are the markets of the developing nations adequate enough to compensate for the stagnating traditional asbestos markets?

First of all, it should be noted that demand in developing countries is mostly for asbestos-cement products, given their construction and irrigation needs. On the other hand, in industrialized countries, the recession is having an effect not only on the asbestos-cement market but on the market for other types of products, thus affecting demand for certain grades of fibre. In this light, the declining demand for these grades of fibre cannot be entirely offset by the demand for the fibre used in manufacturing asbestos-cement in developing nations.

• In the short term, what can the industry do to get through this difficult period without suffering too many ill effects?

No one at the moment can say with any certainty when the economy will

improve and, hence, bring about a recovery in the industrial sectors, notably the construction industry, which constitute the major markets for asbestos. Until that time, the producers of Québec and Canada will have to make every possible effort to improve their competitive position on the international markets.

Although each producer manages his operations as he sees fit, there are



nevertheless certain material constraints that are common to the industry as a whole and that call for similar solutions. Indeed, all producers have been affected by the constantly rising cost of energy and of the goods and services used by the producing industry. Similarly, each of them is faced with the increasing cost of labour. To alleviate these problems in the immediate future, producers must make the best possible use of the equipment and materials at their disposal and, generally, improve productivity in their mines and mills.

At the same time, the producers must also prepare for the future in order to take advantage of an eventual economic recovery.

• In the longer term, what major challenges will specifically have to be met to assure the survival and growth of the asbestos industry?

In the first place, we will necessarily have to neutralize the multiplier effect created in the industrialized countries by the major controversy over asbestos and health, safety and the environment. Now more than ever, producers will have to form a common front in this matter and unwaveringly pursue their attempts to halt the anti-asbestos movement. Failing this action, not only will the present decline of traditional markets escalate, but the impact of legislation and regulations aimed at restricting the use of asbestos could, in the more or less short term, spread to the developing countries where the most promising markets are found.

In the pursuit of these objectives, I think that consideration will have to be given to regrouping the entire Canadian industry into a truly pan-Canadian organization having close ties with the federal government and the provincial governments concerned. Such an organization could lead to the creation of a national information centre exclusively devoted to the defence and promotion of asbestos in Canada and around the world.

On another level, although still with the purpose of securing the future, it is equally important to promote the development of new products and of new applications that use asbestos safely, in order to offset the foreseeable disappearance of mature products and the appearance, in some applications, of viable substitutes.

From this standpoint, it might be desirable for the Institut de Recherche et de Développement sur l'Amiante to increasingly orient its work toward the implementation of projects for the



development of products and techniques promoting the use of asbestos.

• What does the industry expect of the World Symposium on Asbestos with regard to the image of asbestos?

Actually, the Symposium is the

responsibility of the Canadian and Québec governments, jointly with the Commission of the European Communities. The mining industry is also involved, as one of the socio-economic partners with an interest in asbestos, along with the scientific and medical community and the labour movement.

We nevertheless subscribe to the orientation of this unprecedented international conference, inasmuch as we must trust that an exhaustive evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of asbestos, based on the most recent scientific, medical and technological data, will introduce the possibility of reconciling, in this particular case, economic and commercial interests with social preoccupations, including the quality of life.

The importance the industry attaches to the Symposium and its keen interest in this international event stem from our conviction that a truly objective overall view of the current

asbestos situation, and an honest and fair debate on the major issues that form the core preoccupation of those concerned in various ways with asbestos, can but promote the rehabilitation of the product and show that society can live with asbestos.

• Generally speaking, what kind of future do you foresee for the industry?

In the short term, given the economic situation, the asbestos industry will be facing a difficult period of indeterminate length. However, sooner or later, the economy will recover its vitality and the industry may enjoy a revival, still on the condition that the action taken to rehabilitate the product's image and to create new markets has a positive impact. These are, in fact, essential conditions to the viability and growth of the asbestos industry and, particularly, of a mining industry unable to recycle its production.

New AMAQ Board of Directors

Jean Dupéré, President of Lac d'amiante du Québec, Ltée, was elected President of the Association des mines d'amiante du Québec for the year 1982 at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Association. He succeeds Michael Prus.

The other directors are J.P. Power, Chairman and President of Johns-Manville Canada Inc., who is the

AMAQ's representative to the Governing Council of the AIA, and Michael Prus, President of Carey-Canada Inc.

There are two chairmanship changes on the AMAQ committees. Michael Prus is the new Chairman of the Public Relations Committee, succeeding J.H.M. Hutcheson who retired in 1981. Bernard Goultombe, Plant Engineer, Johns-Manville Canada, replaced D. Williams in July 1981 as Chairman of the Environmental Protection Committee.

Other committee chairmen are Uniform Classification and Grading Committee: Keith S. Jackson, Vice-

President, Mineral Processing, Les Mines d'amiante Bell, Technical Committee: E.J. Day, Manager, Engineering and Technical Services, Johns-Manville Canada, Industrial Relations Committee: R.B. Gresham, Vice-President and Mine Manager, Johns-Manville Canada, Health, Safety and Compensation Committee: Jean Dupéré, President, Lac d'amiante du Québec, Transportation Committee: R.P. Gagnon, Vice-President, Marketing, Lac d'amiante du Québec, Legislation and Taxation Committee: post to be filled, Occupational Health and Hygiene Committee: Dr. Michel Lesage, Medical Advisor to the Association.

Tobacco and lifestyle: the chief causes of cancer

Quantitative estimates of cancer risks in the United States attribute 65% of the current total number of deaths caused by common types of cancer to tobacco and to lifestyle, more specifically nutritional factors. Tobacco is considered responsible for 30% of these cancer deaths and diet, for 35%.

These estimates were made by researchers Richard Doll and Richard Peto of Oxford University, England, in a study commissioned by the Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress.

Three concurrent studies

The results obtained by Doll and Peto (Table 1) from a nation-wide in-depth study of a wide range of epidemiological data clearly tally with those presented by Higgenson and Muir following a similar study of cancer cases in the Birmingham region of England (Table 2). They also agree with those of Wynder and Gori who analyzed the cancer incidence in a smaller American population group (Table 3) than that studied by Peto.

The similarity of the results of these three studies appears to indicate that the incidence of cancer would vary very little from one scale to another and from one country to another.

Table 1

PERCENTAGES OF CANCER DEATHS ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS DIFFERENT FACTORS*		
Factor or class of factors	Best estimate	Range of acceptable estimates
Tobacco	30	25 - 40
Alcohol	3	2 - 4
Diet	35	10 - 70
Food additives	<1	- 5 - 2
Reproductive and sexual behavior	7	1 - 13
Occupation	4	2 - 6
Pollution	2	<1 - 5
Industrial products	<1	<1 - 2
Medicines and medical procedures	1	0.5 - 3
Geophysical factors	3	2 - 4
Infection	10?	1 - 7
Unknown	?	?

* Doll and Peto — United States

It is, therefore, more than likely that Doll and Peto's factor comparison table can be applied to all industrialized countries, and particularly to Canada where living habits are very similar to those found in the United States.

Occupation: responsible for approximately 4% of cancer deaths

Only 4% of all cancer deaths are attributed to occupation by the authors. They point out, however, that this factor tends to be concentrated among a relatively small number of individuals for whom the risk of developing the disease may be high. On the other hand, according to the researchers, these risks can be reduced and even eliminated as soon as they are clearly identified.

Table 2

PERCENTAGES OF CANCER CASES ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS DIFFERENT FACTORS*		
Factor or class of factors	Male	Female
Tobacco	30	7
Tobacco/alcohol	5	3
Lifestyle	30	63
Occupation	6	2
Sunlight	10	10
Ionizing radiations	1	1
Iatrogenic (medical)	1	1
Congenital	2	2
Unknown	15	11

* Higgenson and Muir — Birmingham, England

Table 3

PERCENTAGES OF CANCER CASES ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS DIFFERENT FACTORS*		
Factor or class of factors	Male	Female
Tobacco	28	8
Tobacco/alcohol	4	1
Diet	40	57
Occupation	4	2
Sunlight and ionizing radiations	8	8
Exogenous hormones	—	4
Congenital and unknown	16	20

* Wynder and Gori — United States

In certain sections of the population, therefore, greater attention than would be indicated by the factor comparison table must be brought to bear on the detection and prevention of cancer risks linked to occupation. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that the chief causes of 65% of all common cancers are still tobacco and diet. By comparison, factors connected with the work environment only play a secondary role.

The results of the Doll and Peto study show how important it is to carefully weight each of the causes of cancer, because underestimating the effects of certain factors, such as tobacco and lifestyle, may have grave consequences.

The U.S. Public Health Service confirms findings

A report, recently published by the U.S. Government Public Health Service, supports the findings of the Doll and Peto study. Based on data concerning the effects of tobacco which have been compiled since 1964, the American report states that "tobacco's contribution to all cancer deaths is estimated to be 30%".

As well as pointing out that smoking is the main cause of lung cancer, the report also links smoking with other forms of cancer, such as throat, larynx, bladder, kidney and pancreas cancer.

According to the data cited, 412,000 American deaths have been attributed to cancer in 1980 and this figure is expected to grow to 430,000 in 1982. The 30% proportion means tobacco alone could contribute to 129,000 of these deaths this year.

The authors of the report believe 85% of lung cancers and between 22% and 38% of all cancers would be prevented if Americans stopped smoking. Their opinion coincides with that of Doll and Peto according to which clear identification of the causes of cancer will lead to a decrease in and even elimination of cancer risks.

Substitutes: the unknown factor

The introduction of various products on the market as substitutes for asbestos raises the whole problem of the safety aspect of these products. Indeed, although the health hazards involved in the use of asbestos are known and, hence, easier to control, this is not necessarily the case for the substitutes whose potential harmful effects are often unknown.

It is therefore encouraging to see a recommendation on the subject in a report submitted to the Governing Body of the ILO by a group of experts brought together by this organization to study safety in the use of asbestos.

The approach advocated in the group's report requires that all substitute products be subjected before use to thorough testing to ensure they are not introducing unexpected hazards and to determine their degree of safety.

Mineral wool

It would be appropriate to mention here the results of a Swedish study dealing with mineral wool. This study found, among other things, that mineral wool fibres have carcinogenic effects on animals.

Although epidemiological studies have not established that there is an increased risk of cancer among workers exposed to these fibres, the authors of the study feel there is reason to fear for the future, as the production of mineral wool grows, especially since the industry is making increased use of long and thin fibres, the very ones suspected of being carcinogenic.

It may be recalled that it was as a result of much more conclusive and thorough studies that Sweden adopted very strict regulations governing the use of asbestos. It might, therefore, be advisable to delve further into the effects of not just mineral wool but all the products that are accepted today as "valid" asbestos substitutes.

Defending asbestos calls for collective action*

In the twelve months that have passed since our Association's last general meeting, the outlook for the asbestos industry, which was not very bright at the end of 1980, has grown even dimmer.

It is little consolation to observe that the difficulties facing our industry are caused primarily by unfavourable economic conditions affecting the entire Western World, conditions from which virtually no industrial or manufacturing sector is exempt.

As far as asbestos is concerned — whether it be in the mining or manufacturing sectors — the negative effects of this situation are in direct proportion to the decline of both the building and construction industry and the automobile industry, which represent 70% and 10%, respectively, of the fibre market.

The relative increase in demand for asbestos in developing countries does not begin to make up for the significant drop that has occurred in the industrialized nations, which represent two-thirds of the market for Québec-produced asbestos fibre.

Downward trend

The resulting downward trend in delivery levels that continued throughout 1981 caused a major reduction in mine production, which in turn gave rise and continues to give rise to shortened work periods, temporary layoffs and, in some cases, more or less prolonged stoppages in mining and processing operations.

Despite the measures taken to rationalize production, the entire asbestos mining industry is experiencing both financially and economically

one of the most difficult periods in its history — and there is no sign on the immediate horizon that a speedy recovery will take place. Meanwhile, inventory is accumulating at an unprecedented pace.

Under the circumstances, just maintaining a viable level of production requires and will continue to require greater effort and increased vigilance with regard to marketing, boosting productivity and remaining on a par with international competition.

A collective effort

In this respect, it is up to each individual producer to manage his own affairs. Nevertheless, there are some areas of intervention that necessitate a concerted effort and a pooling of intellectual and material resources by the industry as a whole.

This is especially the case in dealing with another cause of the decline in fibre sales, namely, the adverse publicity asbestos has received and the resulting stream of regulations aimed at limiting its use and sometimes even banning it outright.

When it comes to promoting and defending our product, to changing public opinion about asbestos and ensuring that the industry's point of view is well represented in the intense controversy surrounding the fibre, or when it comes to supporting and guiding research and development efforts geared to product safety and new applications, there is everything to be gained by acting collectively.

Indeed, this is the very purpose of bringing producers together in an association such as ours.

Activities in 1981

In this regard, I feel we can be proud of the work accomplished in the past year through the Association. In particular, I am thinking of the excellent quality, from the technological, scientific and medical standpoints, of the representations made by AMAQ on behalf of the industry to the Ontario Royal Commission of Inquiry into asbestos.

There was also the extremely well-documented report submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Labour, in which the Association clearly demonstrated that the draft regulation prepared by the Ministry to lower the standard for asbestos exposure in the workplace had no scientific basis and could not be justified either medically, socially or economically.

At the international level, AMAQ and other members of the Institut de la Médecine du Travail et de l'Environnement played a major role at the third biennial conference of the Asbestos International Association held in London last May. Indeed, to a large extent it was the initiative of the Canadian producers that was responsible for the AIA's adoption of an international code of good practice, establishing rules of ethical conduct for both producers and users of asbestos.

In addition, AMAQ's member companies have continued to lend very substantial support, through the IRDA, for research and development, and they have been particularly helpful in encouraging innovation aimed at developing new applications for asbestos.

The Symposium

On another front, it is common knowledge that the Association and the Institut de la Médecine du Travail et de l'Environnement have been closely associated with the project sponsored by the governments of Canada and Québec and the Commission of the European Communities to hold a World Symposium on Asbestos in May 1982, an idea that originated during an international conference on communications organized by AMAQ at Montebello in the Spring of 1980.

From the start, this vast and ambitious project, whose aim is to develop as objective and complete an analysis as possible of the current asbestos situation in light of the many controversies surrounding it, has received the full support of the mining industry.

Recommendations to the ILO

Just as the Symposium is likely to be the outstanding event of 1982 in the asbestos sector, the highlight of 1981 was undoubtedly the encouraging development within the International Labour Office as a result of the conclusions and recommendations of a meeting of experts convened by the ILO's Governing Body to study safety in relation to asbestos use. According to these experts the risk connected with exposure to asbestos dust can be reduced by minimizing the exposure. They also determined that there is no reason for asbestos to be replaced by other substances unless the latter

offer equal technical advantages while being proved less harmful. In other words, the experts convened by the ILO do not recommend that asbestos be banned, but rather controlled. Moreover, they favour substitution only on the express condition that the substitutes offer equal technical advantages and have undergone extensive testing prior to use in order to determine their degree of safety and ensure that they do not introduce other unforeseen hazards.

While not necessarily agreeing with all of the conclusions and recommendations in the ILO report, we could not help but be pleased that the direction taken by the experts, who met in October 1981 in Geneva, tends to indicate a return to a certain degree of common sense.

A word of thanks

I would not wish to conclude this rather sketchy review of the past year without mentioning the retirement of

two of AMAQ's directors, Mike Messel and Bob Hutchison. Both of these men dedicated most of their working lives to the asbestos industry, an industry they had intimate knowledge of. As executives, they were universally respected and their strong personalities profoundly influenced the asbestos industry for many years, especially with regard to the activities of this Association over which they presided numerous times.

The entire asbestos community is deeply indebted to Mr. Messel and Mr. Hutchison for their invaluable contributions, and we sincerely wish them the happiest of retirements.

For us, and for their successors on AMAQ's board of directors, Messrs. Dupéré and Power, the struggle continues.

* Remarks by Michael Prus, outgoing President of the Association des mines d'amiante du Québec, at the 33rd General Meeting of the Association.

Internationally-renowned speakers to address World Symposium on Asbestos

Many internationally-known scientists have agreed to be guest speakers and panelists at the World Symposium on Asbestos scheduled to take place in Montréal in May 1982.

Among the prominent individuals from the scientific and medical communities who have confirmed their participation as speakers are: from the United States Drs. Irving Selikoff, John Higginson and Philip Enterline; from Canada Drs. Corbett and Alison McDonald; from the U.K. Drs. Julian Peto and J.C. Wagner; from France Professors René Truhaut and Jean Bignon; from West Germany Prof. D. Schmaehl and Dr. S. Döbhart; from the Netherlands Dr. R. Lanfing, as well as many other researchers, epidemiologists, toxicologists and specialists in occupational medicine who, within the framework of the Symposium, will be making a comprehensive medico-scientific assessment of the current asbestos situation.

Government and union representation

In addition to the important contribution to this international gathering by the scientific community, Symposium

organizers have ensured the participation of highly-qualified speakers and panelists to deal with the social and economic aspects of the controversy surrounding asbestos.

Among those who will be addressing the Symposium on these issues are such distinguished individuals as Charles Levinson, of the International Chemical Employees Federation, Ann M. Gorsuch, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, William J. Simpson, Chairman of Great Britain's Health and Safety Commission and Dr. William Hunter, responsible for occupational health and safety in the Commission of the European Communities.

A total of 72 speakers and panelists from government departments and agencies, unions, industry and the scientific and medical community will take part in the program of the Symposium. Coming from 14 different European, Asian, African and North American countries, they represent virtually the entire body of current world opinion on asbestos.

Asbestos production in 1981

The decline in construction activity in the whole Western World and the difficulties experienced by the North American automobile industry in 1981 have brought about a marked drop in demand for asbestos-cement and friction products. This resulted in a substantial decrease in fibre deliveries for the Canadian producing industry, particularly for grades 4, 5 and 6.

Québec

Québec deliveries, not including production from the Asbestos Hill deposit*, amounted to 929 229 metric tonnes, against 1 038 716 tonnes in 1980, a decrease of 10.5% (109 487 tonnes).

The value of Québec deliveries is estimated to be about \$456 million compared with an approximate value of \$495 million in 1980, a decrease of some 8%. It must be stressed that this drop is partly due to the fact that a greater proportion of short fibre was delivered this year. The value of this fibre is lower than that of longer grade 4, 5 and 6 fibres.

Canada

Canadian deliveries of asbestos fibre in 1981 were 1 079 715 metric tonnes against 1 202 511 tonnes in

1980, a drop of 122 796 tonnes or 10.2%. The approximate value of Canadian deliveries amounted to \$561 million, a 2.4% decrease compared with the previous year when sales totalled about \$575 million.

Québec's share of the total Canadian deliveries remained roughly the same at 86%, while British Columbia's deliveries dropped from 95 710 tonnes in 1980 to 80 196 tonnes in 1981, a 16.2% decrease, and Newfoundland's climbed from 68 085 tonnes in 1980 to 70 290 tonnes in 1981, a 3.2% increase.

It should be mentioned here that all production ceased in Newfoundland

on December 31, 1981 with the closing of the Advocate mine.

Prospects for 1982

It is already clear that the stock accumulation resulting from the 1981 slump in sales will lead to a decrease in 1982 production levels. Furthermore, unless the adverse economic situation prevailing throughout the Western World recovers, further drops in demand must be expected in 1982. The short-term prospects, therefore, are not very encouraging for the asbestos industry as a whole.

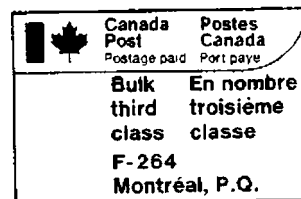
* The ore extracted from Asbestos Hill is processed in the Federal Republic of Germany.

CANADIAN PRODUCTION OF ASBESTOS		
	(in metric tonnes)	
	1980	1981
CANADA	1 202 511	1 079 715
QUÉBEC	1 038 716	929 229
BRITISH COLUMBIA	95 710	80 196
NEWFOUNDLAND	68 085	70 290

Bulletin

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