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THE SHIPPING FEDERATION
LIMITED

Telegrams—"TRAFFIC, 'PHONE, LONDON."
Telephone—ROYal 8131 (10 lines)

THAMES DISTRICT

Shipping Federation House,
146-150, Minories,
LONDON, E.C.3.

Reference : 15B/66

21st January, 1966.

Dear Sir,

ASBESTOS IN BAGS

For some time a dispute has existed in the Ocean Trades of the Port of London over the discharge of Asbestos in Bags and as a result of the action by the Stevedore Section of the National Amalgamated Stevedores & Dockers, certain Companies ceased to bring this commodity to the Port.

As no progress could be made within the industry, the Ministry of Labour was prevailed upon to cause an investigation to be conducted into the discharge of Asbestos and its effects upon the health of the handler. A copy of the Report subsequently issued is enclosed for your information.

The conclusions reached by the Ministry were accepted by the Trade and also by the Employers' Side of the Ocean Shipowners' Group Joint Committee, but the Trade Unions indicated that in view of opinions expressed in current Newspaper Articles they were unable to recommend the conclusions to their members.

In these circumstances arrangements were eventually made for the Trade Union Officials, together with the writer, to meet one of the Deputy Chief Inspectors of Factories and the Deputy Senior Medical Inspector of the Factory Inspectorate.

A useful discussion then ensued with the result that the Ministry agreed to take a further dust count on a vessel then due from Canada with a new pack and the Unions, on their part, agreed that the consignment should be discharged at a proper piecework stroke. The discharge of that ship and subsequent ships proceeded satisfactorily, but the men, despite the Ministry's opinion, insisted that approved face masks should be issued and this the Employers conceded.

A representative of the trade present when this dust count was taken was not altogether satisfied that the pack was strictly in accordance with the Ministry's recommendations and took steps to have this rectified for future consignments. He, and also the Trade Union Officials, complained of the stowage in one of the hatches in that the paper bags had been partially overstowed with heavy reels of craft liner board and further that some bags had been used for filling in broken stowage between the craft liner board. As a result, some of the bags had been so damaged that a quantity of loose was present.

On these circumstances being reported to the Ocean Shipowners' Group Joint Committee it was jointly decided that I should bring the position to the notice of all Shipowners, since with a commodity suspected of being capable of causing serious medical disease, it was felt that every care should be exercised to lessen the quantity of loose and resultant dust in the atmosphere of ships holds.

In the light of the steps being taken by the Trade to improve the pack and in the hope that Asbestos would be given a reasonable block stowage adequately protected from damage by other heavier cargo, the Trade Unions indicated that their members, whilst continuing to exercise care by wearing approved face masks, would revert to handling Asbestos in a normal manner.

I have, therefore, to request that particular attention is given to the stowage of this commodity and would add that this is in the interest of shipowners, since whilst the dispute existed many ships were so seriously delayed that certain shipowners suspended shipments entirely.

With Asbestos packed in suitable impervious bags and given a good block stowage, there is no reason why the difficulties should arise on discharge in the Port of London Ocean Trades in the future.

Yours faithfully,

D. L. BENNETT.

District Secretary.

Enclosure :