

LETTERS

Asbestos Safety Reaffirmed

TO THE EDITOR: The article titled "Asbestos: Awaiting 'Trial'" (*CW*, Sept. 10, p. 32) contains many inaccuracies, which have led to erroneous assumptions and false conclusions. Briefly, the facts are these:

(1) Asbestos is a uniquely useful product serving the needs of modern man and society, and it is not likely to be replaced by economically feasible synthetic polymers, or anything else, in the foreseeable future.

(2) No published reports, even the most speculative, support the generalized statements in your article regarding health effects of possible exposure to asbestos.

(3) There is no basis for the suggestion that Congress "may act" regarding asbestos use, for no such proposals are being considered by Congress. We are informed that the congressman quoted as predicting action disclaims any knowledge of health evidence relating to asbestos or of proposals to control its use.

(4) No evidence exists to show that asbestos poses health risks for the general public or to show that even 1% of Americans have "mild chronic asbestosis," much less the 40% figure you give in your article.

(5) Regarding your list of "sources of airborne asbestos," there are no data to support the contention in your article that the "man on the street" is exposed to asbestos from these sources, or indeed that these sources contribute asbestos to the ambient air.

(6) We know of no data to support your claim of a sixfold increase in so-called "asbestos-related cancer."

As you doubtless realize, the proper conduct of our business requires us to keep abreast of scientific developments regarding asbestos, both medical and technical. It is our opinion that synthetic polymers are not likely in the

foreseeable future to completely replace asbestos in the many applications for which it is now used. Any synthetics would have to prove superior to natural asbestos and be economically competitive.

As to health aspects, in June of this year the U.S. Surgeon General appeared before the Senate Public Works Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution, with Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine as chairman, to discuss various problems relating to air-pollution abatement. Surgeon General William Stewart enumerated a number of substances in common use, including plastics and asbestos, about which he said: "The public health hazards that may arise from these aspects of environmental contamination have not been adequately documented. In each instance further investigation is needed to determine whether health is indeed threatened and what control measures may be necessary."

In these days when all substances in our air and water and even the food we eat are constantly under scrutiny, as to their effects on the public, the fact that asbestos is among the subjects of investigation is not surprising. In fact, we have always supported and will continue to support investigations by the U.S. Public Health Service and other research scientists.

ROGER HACKNEY
Vice-President
Johns-Manville Corp.
New York

TO THE EDITOR: In reference to your article, "Asbestos: Awaiting 'Trial'" (Sept. 10, p. 32), we know of no scientific evidence supporting the statement that "40% of all Americans have mild, chronic cases of asbestosis."

Even in the asbestos industry, where more is known about exposure levels than among the general population, there is imprecise knowledge about the health effects of exposure to asbestos.

With the cooperation of labor and industry, the Division of Occupational Health has under way a long-range, in-depth study to answer this question, as well as to develop better criteria for the safe handling and manufacture

of asbestos. In the meantime, however, the division will continue to promote the application of known control methods so that the workplace can be kept as healthy as possible.

MURRAY C. BROWN, M.D.
Chief
Division of Occupational Health
Department of Health, Education
& Welfare
Public Health Service
Washington, D.C.

CW is pleased to set the record straight. Some of those interviewed apparently drew unwarranted conclusions from insufficient and dubious data.—Ed.

MEETINGS

Assn. of Official Analytical Chemists, annual meeting, Twin Bridges Marriott Motor Hotel, Washington, D.C., Oct. 10-13.

Technicon International symposium on automation in analytical chemistry, Statler-Hilton Hotel, New York, Oct. 17-19.

Drug, Chemical & Allied Trades Assn., annual meeting, Hollywood Beach Hotel, Hollywood, Fla., Oct. 20-22.

Commercial Chemical Development Assn., discussion of packaging, Drake Hotel, Chicago, Oct. 26-28.

National Assn. of Purchasing Agents, Chemical Group, annual fall conference, Continental Plaza Hotel, Chicago, Oct. 27.

Society of Engineering Science, fourth technical meeting, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, Oct. 31-Nov. 2.

American Society for Metals, national metal congress and exposition, McCormick Place, Chicago, Oct. 31-Nov. 3.

Parental Drug Assn., annual convention, Statler-Hilton Hotel, New York, Nov. 1-4.

Fertilizer Industry round-table conference, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., Nov. 2-4.

The Society of the Plastics Industry, 11th plastics film, sheeting and coated fabrics conference, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, Nov. 9-19; conference on cellular plastics in transportation, Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago, Nov. 15-17.

The Franklin Institute Research Laboratories, fourth annual symposium on the organic-solid state, Philadelphia, Nov. 14.

General Atomic Division of General Dynamics Corp., and Air Force Office of Scientific Research, fundamentals of gas-surface interactions, San Diego, Calif., Dec. 14-16.

CW welcomes expressions of opinion from readers. The only requirements: that they be pertinent, as brief as possible.

Address all correspondence to: H. C. E. Johnson, Chemical Week, 330 West 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

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