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The Central Virginian

Dear Editor:

About a week ago a story was published, first in the Richmond Times-Dispatch and then in other newspapers, relating to W. R. Grace & Co.'s vermiculite mine in Libby, Montana, indicating that problems experienced at that mine could jeopardize W. R. Grace & Co.'s plans to mine vermiculite in Green Springs. This story was not carried in The Central Virginian. However, because many of your readers are interested in W. R. Grace & Co.'s efforts to obtain permission to mine vermiculite in Green Springs, I am writing to comment on that story and hope you will publish this letter.

With regard to our Libby, Montana mine, the implication of the story was that W. R. Grace & Co. might be required by the Mine Enforcement and Safety Administration (MESA) to suspend operations or to shut down permanently the Libby mine if MESA adopted the Labor Department's new, tougher asbestos exposure standard which became effective in July, 1976. This is just not correct. It is true that MESA has been monitoring our operation in Libby, Montana, as they do all mining operations throughout the country regardless of the mineral mined. We have been cooperating with MESA and have expended millions of dollars for the purpose of complying with the MESA standards.

Of importance is the fact that our efforts have been successful, and the October 23, 1975 mine inspection report to which the story refers and which was issued November 26, 1975 (we have no record of a November 1 report alluded to in the story) clearly states: "A complete health and safety regular inspection was conducted at the plant site Of the employees sampled for asbestos, respirable silica, noise and welding fumes, none were overexposed during the sampling period."

All of the samplings taken for exposure to asbestiform minerals during that inspection were below the MESA exposure standards. Further, we expect to be able to meet the Department of Labor's new, tougher standard which became effective in July of this year and which the story stated MESA was expected to adopt within the next 18 months.

On this record we cannot see how the statement in the story that as of October 1975 Libby employees were still being exposed

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to "potentially hazardous concentrations of asbestos" can be defended. In fact, the reference to asbestos is in a sense misleading. The mineral which does appear in the Libby deposit is called tremolite, and it does not have the characteristics of commercial asbestos.

The story also indicated that "From 1973 until earlier this year, most of the 265 workers at the Libby mine were required to wear respirators ... ". This is not correct. Respirators are only used in limited cases for short periods of time for performing such tasks as cleaning out dust collectors.

The story, by innuendo, attempts to associate W. R. Grace & Co.'s Libby operation and the MESA standards for work exposure to asbestiform materials with the Green Springs vermiculite deposits. Quoting the article: "Grace company officials, in public hearings and court testimony during the three-year old dispute over the proposed Green Springs mining operations, have likened the Libby mine to what they envision in Louisa." Not so. I wish to repeat that we have consistently stated that the Green Springs deposit is similar geologically to the South Carolina vermiculite deposit, and it is not accurate to liken it to Libby. This is based on drilling on various sites in Green Springs. Accordingly, we see no problem in mining vermiculite in Green Springs.

Very truly yours,



Thomas L. Lyall
Vice President
Construction Products Division
W. R. Grace & Co.