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Meeting with Dr. Robert Eckardt, 6720 Kelton La., Scottsdale, AZ
85254 (602-991-2320)

Dr. E was director, medical research div., Esso Research & Engrg. Co., Linden NJ, from 1948-1978. He was probably the most knowledgeable person in Exxon on occupational health hazards. He's had no business contact w/Exxon since 1979.

He retired when he did because of the increasingly hostile attitude of management toward control of chemical hazards. Said the ascending Humble Oil execs taking control of what became Exxon (formerly Esso, Humble Oil & Refining Co...) were "strictly bottom line." He said that the middle managers running operations in the company regarded him as somebody who was "trying to put them out of business." He felt he had better luck getting a sympathetic hearing on occasions when he was able to bypass middle mgmt. and speak with top management. I don't know the extent to which he knows top execs that led Exxon (or were ousted) in the 1980s.

In the course of a 2-hr conversation, he volunteered that the Alaska oil spill came as no surprise to him, given management priorities nowadays at Exxon.

Dr. E. has been listed as a state-of-the-art witness in an asbestos case, testifying that before Selikoff (mid-1960s), the risks to insulation handlers was not widely recognized. Interestingly, former Humble Oil ind. hygienist Jim Hammond is testifying on the other side, to the effect that Exxon had an asbestos program (in the 1960s ?). Case involves another oil co., Cities Service.

Esso Occupational Health programs:

Dr. E. started w/Esso looking into cancers in waxmaking workers, scrotal and lung Ca. NCI's Wilhelm Hueper accused Esso of suppressing the data on lung Ca. and Eckardt admits that "the lawyers" refused to let him publish about scrotal cancers because of liability implications (despite the earlier papers in European lit. on that). He says the 2 LCa cases were not significant proof of a risk to publish. He feels the cancer risk came from 10% unrefined oil in the waxes.

Esso started hiring industrial hygienists in the late 1940s, and then began setting corporate exposure limits for specific chemicals workers were exposed to. Some of these men were N.V. (Van) Hendricks, Dick Greif, and Jim Hammond.

Dr. E. compiled and distributed thru Esso worldwide starting 1955 a 2-vol Esso Health Hazards Handbook. This was a looseleaf text, with blue pages exclusively for the use of company doctors, which listed the signs and symptoms of early intoxication from various chemicals. Eckardt says the company feared that disclosing such

information to workers would lead to some faking of poisoning by malingerers. The handbook also listed industrial hygiene control measures to take for the hazards of each operation. The company refused Dr. E. permission to publish this as a text, despite Eckardt's (and my) belief that there was nothing proprietary. The layout was based on separate refining processes, each of which was shown using schematic diagrams taken from standard reference sources of the oil industry. Lower on the page, hazards were listed and control options cited. Each copy of the handbook is numbered, Eckardt's copy is No. 2, and he showed parts of it to me.

Dr. E. also distributed monthly packets of abstracts of articles that dealt with occupational health hazards. They employed a woman to do this even part-time after she no longer worked with the company fulltime. These were distributed throughout Esso operations worldwide starting sometime in the 1950s.

In 1977, Dr E wanted to present a paper in Brighton, UK on the carcinogenicity of an oil or gas additive (an adipate?). The company at first denied permission, citing fears of publicity and public reaction. Dr. E. insisted that he would present the paper even if he had to quit Exxon first to do it. They relented, and of course there was no publicity at all when the paper was presented in England.

Some of Eckardt's souring on the industry's level of corporate responsibility is evident in an article he wrote upon retiring, published in the AIHA Journal (40: 1136, Dec., 1979).

Dr. E. has some difficulty breathing, I have no idea why. He must be around 75 years old.

Barry Castleman