

HON. MINISTER:

In response to the letters from the Asbestos Diseases / Society and lawyers Lavan Solomon (reference my minute of 15 November), a thorough search was made to determine what material is still available in departmental files regarding dust conditions during mining and milling operations at Wittenoom from 1943 to 1966.

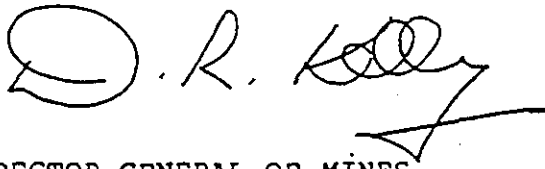
Although some important files were destroyed several years ago, in accordance with the authorized practice for defunct files, much information is still preserved on files held in the Mines Department and others previously held in Kalgoorlie and Karratha. Relevant material has been summarized in the attached report. — f 88 - 120.

The files record attempts by Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd to control dust in the mine and treatment plant throughout the history of the Wittenoom operation. Attention was first drawn to the dust menace by a Mines Department inspector in 1946, and over the ensuing years there were repeated directions by inspectors, warnings by the Public Health Department, and complaints by workmen and their unions.

In hindsight, it is difficult to understand how the situation could have been allowed to continue; however it must be remembered that Wittenoom was then one of the few mining operations in the State outside the Goldfields, and it was heavily subsidized. If a decision had been made to close the mine it is most unlikely that this action would have received support from either the general public or the miners, as few would have believed that the health situation was sufficiently serious. The company had threatened on at least one occasion (in 1962) that because of demands being made by the Mines Department for improved dust-control equipment, and in view of the low profitability of the operation, the mine might have to close.

As discussed with you recently, it is a matter of serious concern to this Department that when legal representatives of a person who contracted mesothelioma after working at Wittenoom requested access to relevant files, they were informed that all the files had been destroyed. Furthermore, the same incorrect response was given in answers to parliamentary questions on 2 May and 10 May 1979.

You have indicated the need for a statement to be made to Parliament correcting the previous answers to parliamentary questions and advising of the course of action now being taken by the Department. A draft — 121-123 statement with this objective is submitted for your consideration. It would seem inappropriate to include opinions regarding blame for the Wittenoom situation in this statement, as the matter is sub judice.



DIRECTOR GENERAL OF MINES.

21 November 1984

PEP:DRK:PS

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SYNOPSIS OF RELEVANT FILES ON WITTENOOM

File 1248/84

Australian Blue Asbestos Limited District Inspector of Mines

- f.3. Progress report by Inspector of Mines, Cue on the setting up of the mine, dated 9 June 1944.
- f.22. Report by the District Inspector of Mines dated 17 September 1946. He draws attention to the "terrific" dust problem at the plant. "In any dry crushing plant the dust menace must be accepted as a major principle of design, not as an after-thought."
- f.27. Letter dated 15 November 1948 addressed to the Workmen's Inspector from the Inspector of Mines stating that although a new mill is to be erected at the mine "in which adequate provision is to be made for dust prevention, the men are fully justified in their concern about conditions which now exist. Conditions are definitely bad. You would be within your rights in pressing for improvement to the existing plant." This was in response to a letter of complaint from the AWU.
- f.28. 14 November 1949 letter from the Acting State Mining Engineer addressed to the District Inspector of Mines at Cue informing him of the Workmen's Inspector's report on bad conditions underground, in the changerooms, and in the mill, and asking the DIM to investigate.
- f.30. Letter dated 18 November 1949 to the Workmen's Inspector from the Inspector of Mines "you should go to the mine as soon as convenient and inform the manager that continued breaches of the Act are likely to lead to prosecution."
- f.34. Letter from the Acting SIM to the DIM at Cue (Mr Boyland) dated 6 February 1950 referring to the Workmen's Inspector's report on bad conditions at the mill and also referring to a letter received from the Department of Health "in which reference is made to the danger to health that exists in this plant."
- f.36. Handwritten copy of letter (undated but known from the reply to have been dated 14 February 1950) from DIM, Cue to Manager, Australian Blue Asbestos, stating that "the continued dusty conditions are detrimental to the health of employees." Further that "I now request that the milling section be totally enclosed by walls and that suitable dust extractors be placed in the roof."

- f.37. Letter from the DIM, Cue to the State Mining Engineer dated 14 February 1950 referring to a visit to the mine and to the above letter. He found conditions generally satisfactory but expected the plant to be dusty for one reason or another and that he had written to the company asking that the mill be totally enclosed and that exhaust dust collectors be installed.

- f.47. Letter dated 17 February 1950 from the manager to the District Inspector of Mines, Cue, in reply to his letter of 14 February written under Section 22 requesting the company to totally enclose the plant. In the letter the manager said to he was going to improve the dust collection equipment but objected to enclosing the plant on the grounds that it would make it hotter.

- f.49. Letter from the District Inspector dated 24 April 1950 addressed to the manager referring to an inspection where he found that "the underground ventilation was somewhat backward."

- f.53. 19 June 1950 carbon of a letter to the SME from the District Inspector, Mr Boyland, advising him of the inspection where he closed down all the development faces except two because of bad ventilation. He seemed satisfied that matter will be put in hand to correct the underground and surface problems with regard to ventilation.

- f.65. 12 July 1951 copy of DIM Boyland's record book entry wherein he noted improvements in the milling and underground sections.

- f.77. 21 August 1951 Ventilation Report by Assistant Ventilation Inspector Faichney. The report details a considerable amount of short circuiting resulting in much reduced flows of air to the actual working places; also inefficient practices in distributing auxiliary ventilation air. Some improvement is noted in dust counts in the plant although the area in the vicinity is noted as being very dusty. He refers to the examinations of dust samples from underground and treatment and says that "the amount of fibre visible is very small." Tabulation of dust counts lists dust concentrations underground in the plant. Results range from about 100 to 800 particles per cc.

- f.80. 22 August 1951 copy of a letter received from a Mr Alan Hume to the Senior Inspector of Mines in Kalgoorlie in which he complains that he was taken off a machine because he would not let the bogger bog dry dirt. He was told by the foreman that water was bad for the fibre. He also reports that scraping from stopes was carried out without wetting down. Mr Hume said he was sorry to have to bring the matter to the inspector's attention, but men's health was the most important consideration.
- f.83. 24 September 1951 letter to the manager from the District Inspector in Cue, Jack Boyland, requesting him to water down notwithstanding that he knows that the manager likes to keep the fibre dry. "Dust counts are relatively high and must be brought to a minimum." "I know that it is your desire to keep the fibre as dry as possible, however this consideration must be given a low priority regarding the health of workers."
- f.84. A report to the Senior Inspector from the District Inspector, Cue, noting some improvement in watering down, dated the 24 September 1951.
- f.86. Copy of a letter dated 26 October 1951 from the Commissioner of Public Health addressed to the Under Secretary for Mines stating that "the upper permissible limit of asbestos dust for a working atmosphere is 176 particles per cc. It will be noted that many of the counts are in excess of this." The letter also points out the deficiencies of the konimeter as an instrument for sampling fibres. Reference is made to asbestosis causing a rapid fibrosis of the lung. In this respect "it is therefore apparent on the data submitted that conditions are far from satisfactory and in the interests of the health of the workers this Department must investigate the matter further and press for immediate improvement of supervision and working conditions at Wittenoom." This letter was duly sent to the Senior Inspector of Mines on the 31 October 1951. He then sent it on to the District Inspector of Mines at Cue.
- f.140. Letter 11 June 1955 from the District Inspector of Mines, Cue addressed to the State Mining Engineer referring to an inspection carried out on June 1. He "had occasion to draw the attention of the management to the very unsatisfactory working conditions in the milling section." "No effective modifications aimed at the eradication of dust had

been achieved during the eleven months since my initial inspection." Unless plans for improvement were forthcoming by the end of June the DIM would close the mill. Conditions underground were apparently "as good as I have seen."

- f.141. Letter 21 June 1955 to the District Inspector at Cue from the manager reporting work carried out in the plant to improve ventilation. Acknowledged by minute from DIM dated 24 June 1955 (f.142).
- f.163. Letter dated 24 October 1956 addressed to the District Inspector of Mines, Mr Ibbotson from Mr Crawford, the AWU rep. complaining about smoke and fumes after firing underground.
- f.172 Letter 11 January 1957 to the State Mining Engineer from the District Inspector of Mines, Cue. Reference is made to "conditions throughout the mill were very poor," and that "immediate action was require to ensure a better system of dust control."
- f.192 Letter 8 March 1958 addressed to "Alan" from "Jack"; reference is made to repeated assurances by the manager that "everything will be put in order as regards to dust nuisance in the mill." However the writer does not think much of these assurances, and states that "Conditions as I see it are very little better than they ever were."
- f.193. Letter dated 5 March 1958 addressed to Mr Hunt, Workmen's Inspector, from the AWU rep., Mr Reen, complaining about dust nuisance in the mill, and stating that the situation is getting worse.
- f.194. Letter from the DIM, Cue to the SIM, Kalgoorlie dated 17 March 1958 wherein it is stated that Workmen's Inspector of Mines Hunt had pointed out that he was in agreement with the union rep's sentiments.
- f.195. Letter addressed to the manager, Wittenoom from the DIM, Cue dated March 26, 1958 wherein a number of points in respect of dust problems in the plant are mentioned, and measures required to rectify the situation are outlined.
- f.200. Letter dated 2 March 1958 addressed to the "District Mines Inspector" from J. Fletcher, representative of the AEU. The letter is long and detailed and complains about the dust conditions prevailing in the mill. "In spite of repeated appeals to the management to have this constant fault remedied we have failed in every endeavour."

- f.202. Letter to Manager, ABA, dated 26 March 1958 from DIM, Cue outlining strict measures required to alleviate the dust problem at Wittenoom.
- f.207. Letter dated 3 April 1958 addressed to the Senior Inspector of Mines from the District Inspector, Alan Ibbotson describing an unannounced approach to Wittenoom, in order to avoid forewarning management, followed by an inspection which found conditions to be "particularly good."
- f.214. Letter to the SIM, Kalgoorlie from the DIM, Cue dated 22 May 1958 referring to an inspection made on the 21 May of mine and mill and explaining why he felt it necessary for his visit to be unannounced.
- f.216. Letter to the manager from the DIM, Cue dated 22 May 1958 complimenting him on the conditions in the mill.
- f.228. Letter addressed to the State Mining Engineer from the DIM, Cue dated 22 October 1958. The history of his inspections at Wittenoom is outlined, beginning with his first visit in July 1954, when he "was staggered to see the extremely bad working conditions in the milling section." Following representations from workmen a Board of Reference was constituted and it was agreed that employees who had to work in dusty conditions would receive penalty rates. "I was not at all in favour of this, and Regulation 150 does not permit work to be performed in excessively dusty places. I told the manager that I would enforce this Regulation whether or not the employees were prepared to accept penalty rates." On his most recent visit the plant "was polluted with dust". He describes a temporary unit that had been installed consisting of screen mesh set on four 44-gallon drums and a small hammer mill. This unit was giving off clouds of dust which "was at liberty to penetrate the entire building." He stated his intention to restrict production if conditions are not improved.
- f.229. Letter from State Mining Engineer to the District Inspector dated 5 November 1958. There is no reference to the DIM's proposal to restrict production.
- f.234. Letter from DIM, Cue to Manager, Wittenoom dated 3 April 1959 regarding allegations by the union of "window dressing" by the company for inspector's visits, and the unauthorized practice of Sunday work.
- f.267. Report dated the 24 and 25 June 1960 on the

- f.269. Letter dated 22 July 1960 to the Manager, Australian Blue Asbestos covering the above report, from Simmons, Assistant Inspector of Mines. It states that the new plant is kept in "spotless condition", although for no apparent reason dust counts were "above average". Reference again to the unsuitability of the Watson Konimeter for asbestos measurements, and it is pointed out that dust exhausted from the mill enters the underground workings.
- f.278. Report to the Senior Inspector of Mines, Kalgoorlie from Simmons dated 22 July 1960 including tabulation of dust counts for the plant and for the mine, and a ventilation plan. Stated that action was necessary to prevent dust from the mill entering the mine workings.
- f.279. Letter to the DIM, Cue from SIM dated 17 August 1960 referring to the comparison of a midget impinger and the konimeter for sampling dust in the mine.
- f.280. Copy of the Record Book entry to Manager, ABA, 6 September 1960, signed by the Senior Inspector and Workmen's Inspector "dust from the mill exhaust is interfering with the general ventilation and thus must be stopped." This refers to dust being sucked into the mine ventilation system.
- f.286. Report to the SIM, Kalgoorlie from Simmons dated 15 September 1960 comparing particle and fibre counts taken by the konimeter and the impinger. Asbestos fibres 10-40 microns were counted. They were very few. Dust counts on the other hand varied from 200 to 1000 plus. The average of all the konimeter samples was 620 particles per cc whereas the average of the impinger samples was 451 particles per cc. The impinger collected an average of 2-1/2 fibres per cc while the konimeter collected an average of 1 fibre per cc.
- f.288. Letter to the manager from the SIM dated 19 September 1960 drawing attention to contamination of intake air by bins on the conveyor, also to dust from the plant going into the mine workings.
- f.293. Letter to the SME dated 19 September 1960 from the SIM referring to Simmons' inspection and also the SIM's inspection, which apparently resulted from a complaint regarding Simmons by the mine manager. Reference is also made to airborne dust from the tailings dump being sucked into the mine. "The comparison of dust counts with those taken during previous inspections should be humiliating to the Management, which has now had years of experience

- f.294. Letter from SIM to DIM, Cue dated 3 October 1960 referring to the above ventilation inspection and exhorting the DIM to greater efforts to try to do something about the ventilation.
- f.317. Letter to the manager dated 20 December 1960 from the Senior Inspector giving detailed recommendations with respect to the provision of adequate ventilation underground; also referring to continuing unsatisfactory dust counts at the treatment plant. Attached are tabulation of dust counts which generally are quite moderate. However, dust counts in the mill were still "far too high". "Will you please give all these matters your immediate attention".

File 1249/84

Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd District Inspector of Mines Correspondence, Vol. 2.

- f.17. Ventilation Report for August 1961 dated 15 September 1961 to the Senior Inspector from Simmons, District Inspector of Mines Ventilation. Also attached are tabulations of dust counts referring to underground and surface. There are a great many 1000 plus particles per cc samples. The report complains about inadequate air flows, even non-existent in some places. Also accompanying the monthly report is a report to the Senior Inspector dated 10 September 1961 giving average dust counts in the plant for previous months to June 1960, showing that the August 1961 figure (630 particles/cc) was the highest.
- f.25. Letter to the manager from the District Inspector of Mines, Ventilation dated 9 October 1961 "much dust was found to be entering the mine through the main adit. Counts of 1000 plus, 960, 370, 250, 150 particles per cc were recorded." The mine air appeared much more dust laden during this inspection than any previous inspection."
- f.28. Letter to the manager dated 6 November 1961 from the Senior Inspector of Mines "medical examinations of workers who either are employed or have been employed on your properties at Wittenoom have shown that a dangerous dust menace is present." The letter also contains a directive under Section 22 "to eradicate the dust menace", and under Regulation 150 to the effect that air water jets must be used underground and that

tailings etc. must be sprayed. Reference is also made to dust escaping from the plant which re-enters it and also enters the mine workings. Unless something is done about it "I will be reluctantly compelled to take the necessary action to prevent men being exposed to unhealthy conditions." "Dust, prevalent in your Mining and Milling Sections, threatens...the bodily injury of persons."

- f.30. Record Book entry dated 27 October 1961 signed by the Workmen's Inspector and the DIM, Cue reference is made to dust escaping in various parts of the plant.
- f.34. Letter dated 20 November 1961 to the Senior Inspector from the mine manager referring to the "dust menace" at Wittenoom. This is in reply to the Senior Inspector's Section 22 etc. letter and says that actions are being taken to improve conditions. They "realize the seriousness of the position...we will do everything we possibly can do to reduce the dust to a minimum."
- f.37. 6 December 1961 copy of a letter signed by DIM Ibbotson "because of the highly dangerous nature of the asbestos dust", he instructs the manager to reduce production to an equivalent of 14,000 tons per fortnight.
- f.38. Letter dated 7 December 1961 from the manager to the DIM notifying that an appeal against the above letter would be made.
- f.46. Report addressed to the DIM Ventilation from Assistant Inspector of Mines Loxton dated 29 December 1961. The report refers to an inspection of the ABA mine and quotes dust counts made during that inspection in the main adit of 240 particles per cc which is an appreciable drop from the figure obtained in October when it was 480 particles per cc. Conditions in the mill were said to be "critical" with average dust counts of between 330 and 620 particles per cc. "Much fibre was noticed in the samples."
- f.48. 4 March 1962. Letter from DIM, Port Hedland. It appears that genuine efforts are being made by ABA to alleviate the dust problem.

- f.62. 6 April 1962. Report to SIM by DIM (Ventilation) Kalgoorlie. Conditions appear better than before, although "some asbestos was seen in the underground samples, whereas much fibre was seen in the mill samples." "The Management are definitely trying to control the dust and are spending much money on it, but owing to increased through-put, and the inability of the present dust collection system to handle it, success seems highly improbable."
- f.64. Minute from SIM to SME dated 11 April 1962. "I cannot agree with Inspector Simmons. I fail to see total and concerted effort on the part of Management and the Supervisors in the matter of improving (dust) conditions." Dust counts ranged up to 1000 plus in three areas.
- f.79. 17 July 1962. Report to SME by DIM, Kalgoorlie, Simmons. "Conditions throughout the mine from the dust angle would be at their worst, in fact, the average count for day shift is the highest ever." "Some asbestos was seen in all underground samples and much fibre was seen in the treatment plant samples." "Good cooperation still exists between us and the mine personnel, but it is felt more positive action could be taken with the various projects and problems."
- f.81. Minute to the SME from the Senior Inspector dated 20 July 1962. "The overall dust counts at Australian Blue Asbestos are the worst I have seen". "I am without doubt losing patience with this Company. All our inspectors have gone out of their way to offer assistance to this mine and I am beginning to think that this has been taken as a sign of weakness. All kinds of promises have been made by the Management but very few fulfilled. Inspector Ibbotson and myself both feel that we have reached the stage when we are afraid that our personal disgust could cloud reasonable unbiased interpretation. I have already told the manager that if he does not fulfil his obligations, I personally will initiate prosecutions against him. I must await the results of the present dust collecting tests, but if they are not successful, or if they are successful and work (is) not put in hand to immediately rectify all defects I will be both morally and duty bound to close the mine."

- f.83. Letter to the manager, Wittenoom from the SIM, Kalgoorlie, dated 20 July 1962 advising that in future when an inspector found dust problems he would stop the work or the appliance as appropriate.
- f.84. Minute to the DIM from the SIM dated 20 June wherein the DIM is offered "full backing" for any action he may see fit to take. "After digesting all figures I can only conclude that the Management is too complacently self satisfied and that the Ventilation Officer knows absolutely nothing about ventilation."
- f.105. Minute to the SME from the DIM Port Hedland dated 14 September 1962 referring to an inspection carried out on the 12 and 13 September. The DIM cites some improvements but is still not at all satisfied. He comments that the majority of miners do not seem to understand the need for watering down and for the use of ventilation equipment. "As far as they are concerned time spent in attending to these tasks does not earn them any money, and money is their only concern." He said that a majority of the work force will make no attempt to minimize dust.
- f.107. Minute to the Senior Inspector from the District Inspector of the 9 October 1962 advising that the mining company is increasing production without reference to him notwithstanding his requirement that they limit output to 14,000 tons per fortnight. "I do consider that we still have a major problem with excessive dust...each time the output from the mill is raised we can expect a corresponding deterioration of the working conditions."
- f.108. Report to the Senior Inspector from the District Inspector dated the 13 October 1962 wherein again reference is made to increasing production and the effect this will have by increasing the amount of dust in the mill.
- f.110. Letter from the manager to the DIM, Port Hedland dated 12 October 1962 wherein are quoted tons milled. All figures are below the 14,000 tons limit.
- f.124. Letter to the Manager dated the 15 January 1963 from DIM Ventilation Simmons. He advises that the dust levels of samples taken in the mill were even greater than those taken previously in June 1962, when they were the highest ever recorded. They ranged from 715 to 950 pp/cc.

- f.129. A letter from Dr McNulty to Acting State Mining Engineer Boyland dated the 8 March 1963, enclosing a reprint of his report on the first mesothelioma detected in an asbestos worker in W.A. The miner concerned worked at the Wittenoom mill from 1948 to 1950.
- f.161. Minute addressed to the Senior Inspector from the District Inspector, Port Hedland dated 21 January 1964, asking for backing in the implementation of some regulations with respect to measures required to diminish dust, which is of "known toxic" nature.
- f.163. Reply to the District Inspector from the Senior Inspector dated 28 January promising full co-operation.
- f.170. Minute to the Senior Inspector from the District Inspector dated 25 February 1964 reporting that tailings were being treated and that the mill was in a "shocking condition". No attempt had been made to dampen the feed material.
- f.211. Letter addressed to Ibbotson, District Inspector of Mines, Port Hedland from Dr McNulty, dated 30 November 1964 stating in response to an enquiry made by Mr Ibbotson that the use of asbestos mine tailings for road surfacing around Marble Bar must cease. He says that if there is any difficulty in stopping the Shire Council the DIM should advise the writer who could then take action under the Health Act.
- f.212. Letter dated 5 December 1964 from DIM Ibbotson to the District Engineer, Main Roads Department, Carnarvon, pointing out that Australian Blue Asbestos has ignored advice of the highly toxic nature of asbestos, and that asbestos tailings were still being used as road-building material, including indiscriminant use around Wittenoom itself.
- f.215 Minute addressed to the State Mining Engineer, 5 January 1967 referring to the closure of the mine on the 30 December 1966.

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Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd. MC.22

- f.45. Letter from AWU addressed to SME on 19/4/48 in respect of dust, and also gas from the diesel locomotive. Complaint is made about dust underground and also heavy clouds of dust drifting through the plant including the engine room, fitting shop, and offices. The serious danger to health is pointed out, as is the lack of effective action by management to control dust in the treatment plant.

- f.47. Letter 29 April 1948 to SME from AWU Secretary. "If the industry of producing asbestos is to continue, my Union will insist on every precaution being taken to eliminate dust from the working places, and it is with confidence that we request immediate action by your Department in this matter."

- f.49. Letter 10 May 1948 from SME to Secretary, AWU, Boulder. "The dust in the plant...has been exercising the minds of company officials for some time and they are continually endeavouring to combat the nuisance. It is fully realized that such dust is a menace not only to men, but also to...machinery."

- f.51. Newspaper report 13 May 1948 on dust problems, pointing out that the health of workers in the mill section is exposed to serious danger.

- f.55B- There is a good deal of correspondence relating to
77 the need for government assistance in funding ABA. The Premier and Prime Minister were both involved in this correspondence.

- f.120A. Workmen's Inspector's Weekly Report dated 17 September 1949 - "Inspected the surface plant at Wittenoom and found it to be just as dusty as on any previous visit."

- f.120B. Entry on 18 September complaining about the ventilation underground, which "is getting worse".

- f.121. 11 November 1949 letter from AWU to the SME drawing his attention to the Workmen's Inspector's comments, and requesting action "to secure some amelioration in the disgraceful conditions existing at Wittenoom Gorge."

- f.138. Directive from Acting SME to DIM Boyland, 6 February 1950 asking him to please do something about the Workmen's Inspector's reports, and advising of advice from the Department of Health regarding the danger to health in the plant.

- f.139. Letter 14 February 1950 from DIM Boyland to SME reporting on his visit to the mine on the 19 and 20 January 1950, and advising that he had written to Wittenoom management.
- f.143A. Letter 22 February 1950 from Workmen's Inspector to District Inspector Boyland asking as to the feasibility of appointing a ventilation officer saying that the men complain nothing has been done in respect of ventilation. He found "things generally to be in a very bad condition at the gorge." "Regarding the mill I must admit that this is too big a problem for me to handle."
- f.145A. From SME to DIM, Cue 9 May 1950 referring to the conditions at Wittenoom which had given rise to frequent complaints.
- f.150 From DIM Boyland to SME dated 19 June 1950 reporting on an inspection of the mine and the hard line he had taken with the Manager. "I am satisfied that...both underground and milling sections are now being brought up to scratch."
- f.151. From SME to Under Secretary 14 July 1950 also referring to ventilation matters and in inspection by the SME saying that the underground seemed fine but the conditions of the plant left much to be desired.
- f.178. Minute to Under Treasurer dated 2 April 1951 outlining the level of support provided by Government to the Wittenoom operation.
- f.199. From SIM to SME 17 July 1951 referring to an inspection by an inspector of the Department saying that the ventilation on the mine was good. Also referred to are samples taken by this inspector mostly from the mill which contained a "large count of fibre". Also discussed is the aluminium therapy and the level of silica in the dust.

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 Australian Blue Asbestos.

- f.13. Report from DIM Boyland dated 25 June 1952. In it he refers to an inspection of the mine where underground conditions were very satisfactory but that there is a "dust hazard again" in the mill and that he had instructed them to "totally enclose the mill and place larger extractors or cyclones. If the temperature increases, cool air is to be introduced."

- f.15. Report from DIM Boyland 17 September 1952 to the SME saying that the mill is now being totally enclosed and a great improvement can be seen in the dust control.
- f.16. Newspaper photograph 4 November 1952. The dust cloud above the plant is quite evident.
- f.36 on A good deal of correspondence on the subject of subsidising the Australian Blue Asbestos operation and infrastructure.
- f.68. Report from DIM Boyland 16 July 1953 stating that "dust extractors and eliminators are operating extremely well and the dust nuisance in the mill is practically nil."
- f.70. Report from DIM Boyland to SME dated 20 October 1953 referring to alterations in the plant and "the dust menace was again prevalent."
- f.70A. Report from Lloyd, Assistant State Mining Engineer, 8 December 1953 to the State Mining Engineer - reference is made to the very dusty operation of the mill.
- f.103. From DIM Ibbotson to SME dated 2 August 1954, the report complains of "disgraceful" conditions in the mill.
- f.120- The mining company made strenuous efforts,
122. unsuccessfully, to obtain tariff protection.
- f.131. The State Government to provide a subsidy of £30,000 for a 12 months' period.
- f.133A. Report from DIM Boyland to SME dated 20 June 1956 - in the report he records his pleasure in inspecting the underground workings but again complains about the "general dusty conditions in the mill".

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Australian Blue Asbestos.

- f.59. 16 November 1961, letter from SME To DIM, Cue. Reference is made to "special action" that may have to be taken in respect of "dust nuisance."
- f.101. Letter from ABA to the Premier dated 23 November 1962 requesting Government assistance, and reporting that in 19 years of operation the mining company had only paid one dividend of 7%. "Because of the possible health hazard we are now being pressed to replace our dust-collection equipment with a more efficient installation at a cost of £120,000. Coming at this time we must consider whether or not such a major and non-profit earning expense is justified considering the poor profit record of Australian Blue Asbestos Pty Ltd or whether it would be better to close the mine down. The main consideration against closing is that...the operation can be economic." The company requested the Government to arrange a direct shipping service from Point Samson to east coast ports and a subsidy for diamond drilling costs of up to £30,000 per annum. Such assistance would be needed for a break-even basis of operations, and the company would then be able to make the "exceptional capital expenditure of £150,000 for dust collectors and amenities in the town."
- f.107. The Hon. Premier wrote to the Prime Minister supporting the proposal of a direct shipping service to the east coast, and agreeing to the £30,000 p.a. drilling subsidy for each of two years. The subsidy was not linked to the need for new dust-suppression equipment.

File No. 1392/84

Australian Blue Asbestos, Dust and Ventilation 1948-1959
(Kalgoorlie File)

- f.5. Report from DIM to SME dated 23 February 1948. Reference is made that dust counts were in the vicinity of 300 particles per cc although in one case it was 1,000 plus. The inspector was apparently generally satisfied with the ventilation. The mill was idle at the time of the visit, but it was very dusty and the inspector was therefore concerned that the mess room adjacent to the mill should be moved .

- f.10. Report to the SME from the same District Inspector, G.E. Lloyd dated 26 November 1948 following a visit to the mine on 10 September. One development end was found to have a 1,000 plus particles per cc. Dust conditions in the plant "most unsatisfactory" with three out of seven dust counts at 1,000 plus. The manager was informed of the health danger to the men. The manager responded that the present plant would be replaced after sufficient data were obtained from the present operation.

- f.23. Report dated 13 October 1950 addressed to the SME from the same District Inspector. The report details temperatures and airflows underground. Dust in the treatment plant had "definitely worsened." Out of 12 samples in the plant 8 were at 1,000 plus particles per cc with the lowest at 410 particles per cc, in the dining room 1,000 particles per cc. The samples were viewed through the microscope by the management.

- f.38. Ventilation report dated 12 December 1958 addressed to District Inspector Faichney in Kalgoorlie from E.F. Shenton, Assistant Inspector of Mines "dust counts recorded in the underground workings were in general satisfactorily low." "Considerable amount of dust was being injected from this stack...picked up by air current in the gorge which could move the dust into the cliff openings of the mine." Tabulation of dust counts are attached. "In the Wittenoom mill conditions appeared dusty, but no high counts were recorded. It is possible that the intake jet of the Konimeter may have become choked by fibre. This raises the question of the suitability of the Watson Victor Konimeter to sampling air-borne dust containing fibrous material."

- f.44. Ventilation report dated 24 September 1959 to the SME from District Inspector of Mines Burrows. "The highest dust count in the plant 200 particles per cc." "The old plant is no longer working, and the new plant appeared to be as good as any plant on the Eastern Goldfields."
- f.45. Copy of a letter from the Mines Medical Officer, Dr J. McNulty to Dr Letham dated 12 July 1962 requesting analysis to be carried out of dust samples being forwarded, to determine the silica and asbestos content and the complete size grading of all the particles.
- f.48. Ventilation report dated 21 August 1951 addressed to the SME signed by Faichney, Assistant Ventilation Inspector "since it is necessary that the asbestos when mined should not be wet the amount of dust particles in the air is high. The area in the vicinity of the treatment plant appears very dusty."
- f.52. Letter from miner Allan Hume (27 August 1951) complained that he had been laid off because he had asked that the asbestos ore be wet down before bogging. "men's health is more than just a bit of time to dry out a bit of fibre outside."
- f.54. Report dated 24 September 1951 addressed to the Senior Inspector of Mines from Boyland, DIM. Reference is made to a complaint, apparently about the lack of water used for dust suppression.
- f.56. Minute addressed to the SME from Faichney, Assistant Ventilation Inspector dated 2 November 1951. He refers to the SME's letter 818/51 which carried the advice that the "upper permissible limit for asbestos dust for working atmosphere was 176 particles per cc." The limit for silica dust is 300 particles per cc. He notes the Commissioner for Public Health's objection to the konimeter on the grounds that it probably excludes long fibres and suggests that use should be made of sugar or cotton wool or a gravimetric method using a filter paper to collect dust. "The enforcement of the use of plenty of water in the mine and the consequent need for a fibre-drying process in the treatment plant is an urgent necessity."

- f.59. Copy of a letter from the Commissioner for Public Health addressed to the Under Secretary for Mines dated 26 October 1951. In it the USM is advised of the 176 particles per cc limit for asbestos dust in the working atmosphere. He is also advised "asbestosis produces more rapid fibrosis of the lung than silicosis. The main hazard in asbestosis is from the longer fibres and these will probably be in excess of anything indicated in the counts (from the Konimeter). It is therefore apparent on the data submitted that conditions are far from satisfactory and in the interests of the health of the workers, this Department must investigate the matter further and press for immediate improvement of supervision and working conditions at Wittenoom."
- f.60. Letter from the SME to the SIM dated 31 October 1951 "I understand from Inspector Faichney's report that he does not anticipate any great asbestos hazard in the underground workings due to the fact that there is little if any boring done actually in fibrous material."
- f.65. Ventilation report addressed to the SME from Assistant Inspector of Mines, Ventilation dated 14 August 1952 "...ore in stopes is cleaned...using scraper hoists and there is plenty of dust from these operations as the ore is dry." "Scraper operators are supplied with respirators but few were being used." "In the vicinity of the mill buildings it is very dusty."
- f.75. Ventilation report to the SME from the DIM dated 19 August, 1953 - tabulations of dust counts are attached which contain many 1,000 plus sample counts. "Conditions underground generally were satisfactory. I deplore the lack of the use of water on unbroken dirt underground. Water is used but not to the extent to efficiently minimise the dust hazard." "I consider the worst feature of the mill is the cloud of dust which arises from the mill and then either drifts down to the ground or blows down the gorge. It seems to have a demoralizing effect. By requesting that extensions be added to the exhaust ducts it is hoped that the dust will be taken away from the vicinity of the mill."

- f.87 Ventilation report addressed to the SME from DIM Faichney dated 24 February 1954. Tabulation of dust counts is attached. In the tabulation in the remarks column "boring-vent satisfactory" is shown beside dust counts which are often high, in one case at 1000 plus. The report outlines directions given to management to improve the situation in the mill.

- f.95. Ventilation report addressed to the SME from DIM Faichney dated 9 June 1958. Tabulations of dust counts are attached. These contain several 1000 plus readings. However, "the treatment plant was in the best condition I have ever seen it."

- f.101. Ventilation report to the SME from DIM Faichney dated 11 October 1954; tabulation of dust counts is attached with several high sample results in the plant.

- f.110. Ventilation report dated 17 August 1955 addressed to the SME from Faichney, DIM - dust tabulations are attached. "Rain has kept the surroundings of the plant damp and this prevents one source of dust; that caused by vehicles racing around the plant area." Alteration to the plant to allow for the treatment of ore with the use of water had commenced, and the new process will be operating in February 1956.

- f.120. Ventilation report addressed to DIM Faichney dated 6 September 1956 from Simmons, Assistant Inspector of Mines "the plant is of a very low standard with a very high dust hazard, not only to the surface workers but also to the underground workers at the Wittenoom mine. The proposed alterations to the plant which were to allow for the use of water had to be abandoned because the buyers of the fibre refused to buy fibre which had been wet." A new dust collection system should be operating by the end of March 1957.

- f.133. Ventilation report addressed to the SME from DIM Faichney, 23 August 1957 - "there is no positive airflow through the intake openings", "the attached figures (dust counts) appear to me to be very high for the underground workings"; for the treatment plant "little visible improvement was evident." Tabulation of dust counts are attached and they contain many 1000 plus records. "However much is being attempted in an endeavour to improve the dust collection."

- f.140. Copy of letter to ABA dated 27 August 1957 from DIM, attaching copies of dust counts in the mines and treatment plant, and suggesting that a greater volume of air be made to flow through the working places.
- f.143. Ventilation report to the SME from District Inspector Faichney dated 10 October 1957, reference is made to a Board of Reference which visited the mine on 3 October 1957. Tabulation of dust counts is attached. Faichney advised the Board that there was some improvement in the dust counts and he outlined ways in which the overall situation could be improved.

File 1393/84

Asbestos dust sampling correspondence 1963-65
(Kalgoorlie file).

- f.2. Letter from SIM (Ventilation) dated 15 January 1963 to Manager, ABA, giving a resume of his findings during his visit to Wittenoom in November 1962. Dust concentrations in the mill were as high or higher than usual, despite the reduced tonnage being put through the mill (following a recent cave-in). Dust levels ranged from 715 to 950 particles per cc, compared with 700 to 760 in June 1962.

- f.11. Letter to Dr McNulty from DIM (Ventilation) dated 21 July 1965 advising that there was a considerable amount of fibre in dust samples collected recently at Wittenoom. "Conditions underground at Wittenoom have deteriorated over the past few months." The inspector was about to write to South Africa and Canada to obtain information on methods used there for asbestos dust sampling and suppression.

- f.16. Letter from Dr McNulty to SIM Boyland 25 October 1965 stating that he had recently visited Wittenoom and was pleasantly surprised at many of the improvements made. He discussed criticisms of the konimeter and said that it was imperative that more advanced methods of dust sampling be used. He suggested a visit by Mr B. Major of the Commonwealth Occupational Health Section to report on the situation at Wittenoom. Boyland replied (f.19) that this was a good idea.

- f.25. Reply from Department of Mines, South Africa setting out their ideas on asbestos dust sampling and suppression.

- f.26. Letter from Dr McNulty 18 November 1965 commenting that "it would be advisable to enforce some restrictions on the mining company's use of tailings on their own lease, and some investigation might be made into possible ways of treating the old tailings to stop dust blowing about."

- f.28. Minute from SME to SIM dated 24 November 1965 stating "Our function is to reduce the dust in the mine to the lowest practical limits and we should spare no efforts to obtain this. If these conditions are still a menace to health then it is for the Public Health Department to take whatever action they consider necessary."

- f.57. SIM Kalgoorlie to DIM Port Hedland dated 5 October 1966. "Dr McNulty has previously said that the action of spreading asbestos ore tailings from the mine over roads, playgrounds, and in the residential area creates a major health hazard. If this is so then the mining of asbestos ore creates a definite danger to health - no Mining Engineer could improve conditions to the stage when they could even approach those of tailings spread over a wide area in normal atmosphere. Personally I think that it is up to the Public Health Department to stop operations if that is the Doctor's wish."
- f.59. Letter to Commissioner of Public Health from SIM Kalgoorlie, 5 October 1966. Makes similar comments to those in the minute on f.57. "If those conditions (in the mining and milling operations) are a menace to health then I think it is for the Public Health Department to take whatever action they consider necessary."
- f.61. Letter to SIM from Dr McNulty, 13 October 1966 pointing out that asbestosis had been diagnosed in two men whose only real exposure to asbestos dust had been in carting tailings.
- f.63. Letter from SIM to Dr McNulty dated 17 October 1966, stating that methods of disposing of tailings had not changed. The tailings dump is being continually built up and cannot be effectively sealed.

File No. 1280/57 Volume 34

Ventilation, sanitation and dust in mines

- f.92. Letter to the manager of ABA, Wittenoom dated 26 March 1958 from John Fletcher representing the AEU complaining about dust emission in the mill, defects in the dust collection system, and spillage. He recommends that the mining company correct the faults in the dust collection system and thereby obviate the need to pay the sixpence per hour dust money. He requests the Manager to have the Mines Inspector inspect the place and give "an opinion as to the hazards which are encountered carrying out maintenance work on the plant."
- f.96. Report by DIM Ibbotson to the Senior Inspector dated 3 April 1958 outlining the results of a visit to Wittenoom in response to workmen's complaints. The mill was in good order, but the inspector was inclined to agree with Union Representative Reen that it had been "window dressed" for his visit.
- f.102. Letter from the Senior Inspector addressed to the SME objecting to the DIM's approach to the investigation of a complaint as described in his report dated 3 April 1958 (f.96).
- f.104. Letter from SME to SIM referring to DIM Ibbotson's report and the SIM's remarks and stating "some very definite action is necessary to ensure that a reasonable standard is reached and kept in the Wittenoom mill."
- f.128. Tabulation of dust counts for ABA dated 26 May 1958 - samples range from counts of 3x1000 plus down to 180; the median is probably about 600. These samples were taken underground.
- f.130. Tabulation of dust counts taken in the plant range from 2x1000 plus down to 75; the median is probably about 200.

- f.131. Ventilation Report by DIM Faichney to SME dated 9 June 1958. "Conditions generally appear satisfactory but the counts obtained from dust samples at underground working places are very high" also "the treatment plant at Wittenoom was in the best condition that I have ever seen it." "Dust counts in the three development ends were also high yet these ends are well ventilated by centrifugal fans drawing from the purest source available."

File 258/60 Volume 1

Clarification of position re responsibility for health of mine workers

- f.1-6. Letter from the Mine's Medical Officer, Dr McNulty, dated 13 January 1960 to the Director of Tuberculosis Control Branch on the subject of asbestosis and the comparison of the amount of exposure time for the contraction of this disease as compared with silicosis. In the doctor's opinion 1% of gold miners contract silicosis after 10 years exposure whereas 12% of asbestos workers contract asbestosis after only four years exposure. There are a number of case histories of Wittenoom workers. He also complained about methods being used to measure asbestos dust.
- f.7-8. Letter from the Minister for Health dated 4 March 1960 addressed to the Minister for Mines expressing concern about the asbestosis and the Wittenoom mine.
- f.12. Letter from Minister for Mines to Chief Secretary (Minister for Health) in response to his letter of 4 March. "The figures on Wittenoom are indeed very disquieting". "In the Department of Mines our officers are very conscious of dust nuisance and every possible precaution is taken to minimize the incidence of dust by the provision of adequate ventilation."
- f.18. Copy of letter from General Manager, SGIO, dated 20 June 1960 to Manager, ABA, Wittenoom, expressing concern at the number of worker's compensation cases with asbestos-related diseases for persons who worked at Wittenoom. One recent case was of a person who had worked at Wittenoom for only 33 months.
- f.19. Response to SGIO from Manager, ABA, dated 29 June 1960. Gives dust counts for August 1957 compared with counts in October in that year after new dust-suppression equipment was installed. The letter also outlines the results of a case heard by a Board of Reference for a dust allowance to be paid to workers in the mill. The application was refused. "In conclusion, we would advise that we give our closest attention to the suppression and collection of dust and we feel that the effects will be most beneficial." The letter of acknowledgement from SGIO (f.23) stated that the position would be watched closely by that organization.

- f.28. Minute from SME (26 July 1960) stating that Dr Letham had telephoned asking that the Department purchase Midget Impinger for asbestos dust measurement, as it was claimed that it was more effective than the Konimeter.
- f.29. Response by the Under Secretary for Mines to a letter from the AWU (f. 25) 29 July 1960 stating that the department has "considerable faith" in the Konimeter, which has been used for many years, but that other methods of dust measurements were being investigated. Regular visits would be made to Wittenoom by inspectors and dust counts would be taken.
- f.30. Letter from Dr McNulty dated 29 July 1960 to SME pointing out that correspondence from Canada had recommended the Midget Impinger as being the most suitable instrument for asbestos measurements, rather than the Konimeter. He said that the School of Mines had purchased a Midget Impinger through Sandovers. "The whole picture of industrial chest disease in this state is disappointing, and whilst I have no remedy to offer, I feel that much closer liaison and co-operation between your Department and mine is needed."
- f.31. Response from SME to Dr McNulty dated 2 August 1960. "We have a good deal of faith in the Konimeter because it is a very practical instrument."
- f.36. Letter from Department of Mines, South Africa, 14 July 1960 regarding measures taken in that country regarding asbestosis. In that country it was clear by 1939 that asbestos miners and plant workers were subject to serious health risk from lung disease.
- f.39. Note by SEM to USM 10 October 1960 stating that Dr McNulty considers that the health risk in the Wittenoom asbestos mine is much greater than in gold mines, but that this has been obscured to some extent by the very large turnover of labour at Wittenoom.

- f.40. Further minute from Dr McNulty dated 7 October 1960 on the topic of asbestos hazard and praising the work of the Senior Inspector in endeavouring to have the dust hazard rectified.
- f.44. Results of Wittenoom chest x-ray survey, 1960, prepared by Dr McNulty, showing the high incidence of asbestos-related disease among workers. "It is worth noting that the mere presence at the mine or mill over a relatively short period is sufficient to produce disease and that unlike gold mines, the actual occupation of the worker is not too important." "Effective dust suppression at Australian Blue Asbestos is an urgent and immediate necessity."
- f.52. SME to USM dated 17 November 1960, commenting on Dr McNulty's report. "This report comes as something of a shock. We have known that conditions in the mill were very dusty. I had formed the opinion that the risk was not particularly serious and I think that this opinion was shared by the management. We will press for the further improvement of conditions both in the mine and the mill."
- f.55. SME to USM dated 15 December 1960. Discussions being held with ABA. Measures being taken to improve conditions in the mill and underground.
- f.65. Letter from Dr McNulty to USM dated 2 October 1961 advising that Mr Boyland and he had visited Wittenoom and that the most recent dust counts show that a serious health hazard exists. Many men are seriously affected by silicosis and asbestosis and one man is dying in the Perth chest hospital. "It would appear that repeated advice and warnings about the health hazard from dust have been ineffective and that stronger action will have to be taken."
- f.66. List (October 1961) of 57 persons with lung disease or preliminary indications of such, as a result of working at Wittenoom.
- f.71. Minute dated 12 October 1961, from SME to USM discussing the above list and a meeting with Drs Letham and McNulty. Points out that advanced asbestosis can develop in as little as 3 years. States that there will be the fullest exchange of information between the Mines and Public Health departments.

- f.74. Minute to Hon. Minister from USM dated 13 October 1961 outlining measures to be followed with regard to dust suppression and liaison with Public Health. "The company, like the Government Departments, is most concerned about the position and I think everything possible is being done."
- f.75. Minutes of meeting on 10 October 1961 called at the suggestion of Dr McNulty to discuss health hazards associated with working at Wittenoom. It was agreed that despite the limitations of the Konimeter, it should continue to be used as a means of measuring dust concentrations at Wittenoom.
- f.78. Minute from Under Secretary, Public Health, to USM dated 25 March 1966 on the need for more highly specialized dust measuring equipment. The Commonwealth Department of Public Health was to provide an industrial hygienist, Mr Major, to analyse the situation at Wittenoom.
- f.79 Minute from SME to USM supporting the visit of Mr Major. In a following minute the Hon. Minister agreed to the proposal.
- f.91. Minute from SIM Kalgoorlie to DIM Port Hedland dated 5 October 1966 pointing out that Dr McNulty had stated that the action of spreading asbestos tailings over roads, playgrounds and in the residential area creates a major health hazard. If this is so then the mining of asbestos creates a definite danger to health. "Personally I think it is up to the Public Health Department to stop operations if that is the Doctor's wish."
- f.92. Copy of letter from SIM Kalgoorlie to Commissioner of Public Health dated 5 October 1966 stating that the function of the Mines Department is to reduce dust in the mine to the lowest practical limit, and that "we spare no efforts to do this." However, that it is the Public Health Department's responsibility to take action if conditions are still a menace to health.
- f.95. Letter from Dr McNulty to SIM Kalgoorlie 13 October 1966 regarding the carting of tailings and pointing out that two men whose main work at Wittenoom had consisted of carting tailings had been diagnosed as suffering from asbestosis.

- f.96. Response from SIM to Dr McNulty stating that the disposal of mill tailings has not altered to any great extent, but measures were being taken to minimize dust from tailings as far as practicable. The main source of dust is created by the travelling vehicles themselves.
- f.102, Newspaper cuttings 8 December 1966 on health
103. hazards of asbestos.
- f.106. Letter from doctors to Hon. Minister dated 23 January 1967, expressing concern that the Wittenoom mine (closed 31 December 1966) might reopen and pointing out the health hazards of asbestos mining.
- f.107A. Response from Minister Griffith 22 February 1967, pointing out that the mine had closed the previous year and had not reopened. Applications for mining leases for asbestos could not be refused on health grounds, but any responsible company would meet reasonable requests for installations likely to reduce danger to the health of their employees.
- f.109. Newspaper cutting quoting Dr Letham. 90 Wittenoom miners had asbestosis or silicosis and 12 had died.
- f.112. Minute from SIM to SME 19 December 1967, pointing out that a copy of Mr Major's report had not been received. This was followed (f.113) by a minute to Public Health, and a response from Dr McNulty dated 5 January 1968 advising that despite requests no report had been forthcoming.
- f.125. Report by Dr McNulty to a Pneumoconiosis conference in Sydney (February 1968) on Wittenoom. Since June 1958 103 men who worked at Wittenoom had contracted pneumoconiosis.
- f.134. Letter to SME from Dr McNulty dated 11 March 1968 enclosing his paper together with the draft of Major's paper. "I attach some responsibility (for the Wittenoom situation) to the gulf separating the preventive arm - the Mines Department - and the diagnostic arm - the Health Department. Happily, events recently lead me to believe that the gap is closing and that much closer co-operation will be obtained." The conclusion to Major's paper (f. 126) on the reasons for the Wittenoom situation are worth noting. "The mine and mill were in a remote area, the labour turnover was high, and the material being exploited unfamiliar to most mining personnel."

- f.137. Letter from Mines Medical Officer to USM dated 16 June 1969, stating that he has no knowledge of any intention to re-open this mine.

Asbestos-related disease, Wittenoom, correspondence with Health Department, 1948-1951 (copied from Public Health file held by Dr McNulty).

- f.1. Report by Govt. Chemical Laboratories, including discussion of an asbestos sample, dated 27 January 1948. "Asbestosis is a recognized condition according to a number of authorities and fine dust if present in the atmosphere in sufficient quantity under working conditions could constitute a hazard if not properly controlled."
- f.2. Minute dated 1 June 1948 from Director, Tuberculosis Branch, to Commissioner for Public Health, referring to a discussion with the SME and USM regarding the need for routine examinations of Wittenoom miners and "the extreme public health importance of the control of silicosis, asbestosis, and tuberculosis in miners."
- f.3. Copy of letter dated 6 June 1948 from Dr Eric Saint (then flying doctor in Port Hedland) to Dr Cook, Commissioner of Public Health. The letter includes the statement: "the asbestos mine at Wittenoom (operates) without any sort of dust extractor whatsoever; and ... in a year of two A.B.A. will produce the richest and most lethal crop of cases of asbestosis in the world's literature."
- f.5. Response to Dr Saint from Commissioner dated 16 June 1948. "It is recognized that these workers could easily incur a great(er) hazard than do workers in our gold mines."
- f.10. Undated minute from Minister for Mines to Minister for Health stating that Dr Saint must be misinformed regarding precautions taken at the asbestos works at Wittenoom as the Mines Regulation Act is strictly enforced.
- f.13. Letter dated 28 December 1949 from Acting Commissioner of Public Health to Dr Saint stating that the Minister for Mines affirms that the Mines Regulation Act is strictly enforced at Wittenoom. The letter asks for Dr Saint's opinion of this.
- f.14. Minute to Minister for Public Health from Acting Commissioner, dated 9 January 1950, stating that Dr Saint reports that conditions at the mill are dangerous to health owing to the lack of adequate dust suppression measures. It is suggested that the matter be referred to the Hon. Minister for Mines.

- f.15. Minute from USM to Minister for Mines dated 7 February 1970 advising that Mines Department inspectors have been carefully watching the dust position at Wittenoom, and that the company had advised that the present treatment plant would be discarded and a new one built.
- f.16. Minute from Commissioner for Public Health to Minister dated 20 February 1950 stating that on a recent visit to Wittenoom "The whole of the surroundings within a radius of a mile or more were smothered with the dust which is produced in the treatment. As far as was ascertainable very few, if any, precautions were taken. Asbestos dust if inhaled constitutes a very grave risk and is, if anything, worse than silicosis."
- f.18. Minutes to USM from SME dated 1 March 1950 and to Minister for Mines dated 2 March 1950, subsequently forwarded to Minister for Health. The SME states that he will concur if the Workmen's Inspector recommends prosecution because of the failure of ABA to rectify the dust situation. However, the company has just appointed a ventilation officer, and this may have the desired effect.
- f.22. Minute from USM to Commissioner of Public Health dated 25 July 1950 in answer to his query on the Wittenoom situation dated 5 July. The USM enclosed copies of minutes from SME dated 14 July and from DIM Boyland dated 19 June. The minute from Boyland stated that he was satisfied that all matters that were lacking were being "brought up to scratch." The minute from SME stated that conditions underground appeared reasonably satisfactory, "but conditions in the plant still leave much to be desired." The SME had visited the mine on 11 and 12 July 1950.
- f.25. Minute to USM from Commissioner dated 17 September 1951 in response to one from the USM dated 31 August. It includes the statement "the hazard from asbestos is considerably greater than that from silica and...we have reason to believe that attention to this aspect of mining operations at Wittenoom has been inadequate in the past."

- f.38. Minute from Commissioner to USM 26 October 1951 stating that the upper permissible limit for asbestos dust in the working atmosphere is 176 particles per cc, and that the dust counts forwarded by the USM were well above this. "Conditions are far from satisfactory and in the interests of the health of the workers, this Department must investigate the matter further and press for immediate improvement of supervision and working conditions at Wittenoom." It is also pointed out that the main danger in asbestosis is from the longer fibres and these will probably be in excess of anything indicated in the counts.
- f.40. Minute to the Commissioner from Director, Tuberculosis Branch on the subject of asbestosis. "The onset of the disease is insidious...It takes, on the average, between five and ten years for asbestosis to develop, although it may occur in as short a period as two years where working conditions are bad."
- f.41. Minute from Commissioner to USM enclosing a copy of the above report on asbestosis.
- f.42. Acknowledgement of receipt of the report by USM, stating that the Mines Department will have to watch this problem closely with the assistance and co-operation of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory.
- f.45. Extract from annual report of the Commissioner for 1959 regarding Wittenoom. It is pointed out by Dr McNulty that 12% of asbestos workers developed chest disease after 4 years of exposure, compared with 1% of gold workers after 10 years.

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