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THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
School of Hygiene and Public Health
Department of Health Policy and Management

January 25, 1984

Hon. Norman Stone

Dear Senator Stone:

I have mailed to you a complete information packet on the protective clothing (asbestos) bill. Please let me know immediately if that has not arrived, as it deals with health effects, feasibility, and cost of substitutes, etc.

The amendment proposed by Mr. Doyle that would permit "encapsulated" or coated asbestos garments (e.g., with aluminum) is impractical from a health and economic standpoint. This aluminized covering releases relatively little asbestos fiber the first day of use. However, the thin aluminum coating soon cracks under the conditions of heat and abrasion in which these garments are worn. A Maryland example of this problem is with firefighters' garments: here, garments with aluminum coatings experience disintegration of the coating, and visible asbestos cloth underneath soon becomes visible.

If there are employers who insist on the use of such garments (personally, I doubt that such insistence comes from Maryland employers) they should be required to ask for an exemption, to be permitted only on condition that the employer state that feasible substitutes are not available or practical, that the worker will be informed in writing of the potential hazard, that periodic air monitoring be conducted by the employer to ensure that the worker is not exposed to asbestos levels exceeding those allowed in the OSHA Emergency Standard for Asbestos of 0.5 fibers per milliliter of air, that all such garments be thoroughly inspected at least every 30 days, and that garments demonstrating any break in the aluminized surface and any visible asbestos cloth appearing through the break be discarded in accordance with OSHA standards for disposal of asbestos-containing wastes.

Unless these precautions are followed, the only way of protecting workers would be increased MOSH inspections, imposing an unnecessary regulatory burden on our state's resources.

Please contact me for any questions, and let me know about the progress of this Bill.

Sincerely,

Grace Ziem, M.D., Dr. P. H.

cc: Senator Jerome Connell

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January 27, 1984

Grace Ziem, M.D., Dr. P.H.
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School of Hygiene and Public Health
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Dear Dr. Ziem:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of January 24, 1984. I note that you have also sent a copy of your letter to the Chairman of the Economic Affairs Committee, Senator Jerome F. Connell, Sr.

Please be assured that I will keep you advised of the progress on Senate Bill 160, Occupational Safety and Health - Asbestos Protective Clothing.

I want to let you know, also, that the information packet on protective clothing, which you referred to in your letter, has not arrived at my office as of this date.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

With kind regards, I am

Very truly yours,

Norman R. Stone, Jr.

Copy to:
Senator Jerome F. Connell, Sr.

NRS,JR:bal

Testimony in Favor of a Bill to Ban Asbestos Protective Clothing

Asbestos has long been used in proportions of around 85 percent in industrial gloves, hoods, and coats. These garments protect against heat and splashing metal in a number of industries. Unfortunately, studies since 1970 have shown that these garments also give rise to dangerously high levels of asbestos in the breathing zones of workers wearing them. Exposures more than 50 times the latest OSHA Emergency Standard for Asbestos have been reported from ordinary use of asbestos protective clothing less than one month old (Gibbs, Fibre Release from Asbestos Garments, Ann. Occup. Hyg. 1975).

Regulation of the asbestos textile manufacturers in this country led to a dramatic rise in imports of these products from less regulated locales -- Mexico, Brazil, and Taiwan -- in the 1970's, with a corresponding shrinkage in the domestic industry. More recently, with the development of safer substitutes, the domestic manufacture of asbestos textiles has all but disappeared: output, as indicated by tonnage of asbestos consumed, dropped by 7/8ths between 1978 and 1982. This is mainly an import business today, consisting of asbestos mined in Canada and manufactured into textile cloth in non-regulated plants in developing countries. Some of these plants, on the Mexican border, have been featured in media exposees because of unsatisfactory environmental conditions. (Castleman, The Export of Hazardous Factories to Developing Nations, Internat. J. Health Serv. 1979).

But it is the cancer threat of these asbestos "safety clothes" themselves that led manufacturers to develop alternative products made from safer materials

(synthetic fibers and fibrous glass) which have in large measure replaced the asbestos products. Some larger corporations with large medical departments have established policies of not using asbestos textiles. But in others, old, frayed asbestos gloves and aprons continue in use and continue to be replaced with more asbestos.

The cost-effectiveness and ability to meet demanding conditions are attested to by the large and growing market share of asbestos substitutes. The purpose of this legislation would be to bring about immediate health protection for the affected workers rather than allow years more before market forces and tougher plant regulations accomplish the same end result sometime in the 1990's.