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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590



ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR

FEB 3 1978

Mr. John A. Risendal
Executive Director
Safety and Special Services
Division
Association of American Railroads
1920 L Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036

Dear Mr. Risendal:

This letter is in furtherance of our September 2, 1977 correspondence concerning the use of asbestos in rail welding procedures. As we indicated in our last letter, earlier information upon which we relied in preparing our August 2, 1977 letter was not accurate. For this reason we requested information from rail welding companies concerning their present and past use of asbestos in welding procedures.

We have now completed our survey of rail welding procedures employed by representative manufacturers of rail welding equipment. As the following information indicates, the rail welding industry has made significant progress toward complete elimination of asbestos usage.

Du-Wel Steel Products Company informs us that no materials currently provided with their product contain asbestos. At one time, a small disc of asbestos was used in some cases on the top of the nail or in the crucible bottom (approximately 5% or less of the welds sold in 1972-1976 utilized this procedure). Although asbestos is not recommended, there is evidence that some railroads, on their own initiative, may occasionally be using asbestos as a partial filler when using an oversized mold. The company does not customarily make negative recommendations that asbestos not be used.

Orgotherm Incorporated informs us that some railroads using their field welding equipment may be using a small asbestos washer with its manual thimble methods. However, this method is being replaced by a self-tapping thimble which most railroads are now using. The company believes that this process will minimize handling and/or contact with asbestos by the operator. A particular tapping system is not recommended to their customers, nor do their instructions recommend that asbestos not be used.

The U.S. Thermit, Incorporated rail welding process utilizes a cotton asbestos wicking as a mold packing material which acts as a sealing gasket. The company states that this material is being replaced with a ceramic fiber wicking as current stocks of the asbestos wicking are depleted.

Erico Products, Incorporated, utilizes the Cadweld process which, unlike the other procedures, is not designed to bond rail. The Cadweld process is a procedure for providing signal continuity through the use of welded wire links between rails. Accordingly, their use of exothermic materials is limited and does not involve the use of asbestos.

While the manufacturers of rail welding processes appear to be aware of the potential health hazard of asbestos and are attempting to eliminate its use with their products, some railroads may be continuing a limited use of asbestos in rail welding and other operations. It is these situations which we urge your members to evaluate for potential exposure conditions.

We hope this information will eliminate the confusion resulting from our earlier correspondence.

Sincerely,

Robert H. Wright
Deputy Associate Administrator
for Safety