

Canadian Asbestos Linked to U.S. Rules

BY BRIAN DUNN

MONTREAL (FNS) — The future of the already declining Canadian asbestos textile industry will depend on the regulations enacted by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, according to Paul Filteau, executive vice-president, Quebec Asbestos Mining Association.

Canada is a major producer of asbestos fiber. In 1976, 1,694 tons of asbestos fiber was produced in Canada. Ninety-five per cent was exported, 40 per cent to the United States.

One company, Asten-Hill of Valleyfield, Quebec, discontinued its textile manufacturing operation July 1, because of strict environmental controls.

"There has been a tremendous drop in demand for asbestos yarns and the health regulation of two fibers per cubic centimeter was impossible to meet," said Bill Clark, vice-president.

U.S. regulations now call for no more than two fibers longer than five micrometers per cubic centimeter of air to be present in a plant during an eight-hour day.

"We are not filling as many orders from the U.S. in textile yarns," Clark said. "Certainly strict environmental regulations in the U.S. haven't made any difference to our export market; their regulations and ours are basically the same."

According to Harry M. Hays, of the textile division of Canadian Johns-Manville, asbestos textiles and asbestos paper account for a very small, and getting smaller percentage, of asbestos fiber use.

"The asbestos textile industry was never a large industry. The amount of asbestos fiber used in asbestos textiles never exceeded 2 per cent and now it's down to 1 per cent," Hays explained.

Hays said asbestos textiles are used extensively for dryer felts in the pulp and paper industry, giving the felt dimensional stability. "But more and more, the asbestos textiles are being replaced by synthetics."

Between 1967 and 1975, asbestos textiles produced increased by 1.2 per cent. In 1963, 27.8 million pounds of asbestos textiles were produced. That figure increased only slightly in 1975 to 30 million pounds.

There are very few asbestos manufacturers in Canada — Canadian Johns-Manville; Amiant (French for asbestos) de Sherbrooke, a wholly owned subsidiary of Garlock Industries for Palmyra, N.Y.; Asbestonos Corp., Ltd.; Atlas Asbestos; Armstrong Cork; and American Biltrite.

In June 1975, the Quebec government commissioned a study into the health hazards of the mining and manufacturing industry. The Beaudry report, as it was called, made several recommendations and suggested several standards for the industry.

As of Jan. 1, 1978, no occupational emission could exceed five fibers per cubic centimeter. This level is not to be exceeded at any one time, as opposed to a time-weighted average, which covers an average for eight hours. At the same time, under the federal government's Clean Air Act, effective December 1978, no outside emission will be allowed to exceed two fibers per cubic centimeter to be emitted from crushing, drying or milling operations and from dry rock storage.

"The asbestos industry has already set its own emission level at two fibers per cubic centimeter," Filteau said. "In fact, Johns-Manville closed down its Timmins, Ont., mining operations because they felt they couldn't meet this standard at all times," Filteau added.

Filteau, however, didn't deny the fact that the Beaudry report had increased the cost of production. New equipment has had to be installed for dust control, and floor space has been expanded to allow more air to circulate through machinery.

As an example, Canadian Johns-Manville, regarded as world leader in asbestos environmental control, will spend \$5.2 million on environmental control alone between now and 1980. This is in addition to the \$11 million the company spent between 1966 and 1977 for the same purpose.

But the industry has to contend with more than just the Beaudry report and the federal government Clean Air Act.

"Asbestos fiber used in brake lining has to meet the standards set by the U.S.-Canada Auto Pact," Filteau said. "Since all

brake lining is done in the U.S. because of economies of scale, the asbestos industry must adopt U.S. regulations.

"In California, a substitute was found for asbestos fiber used in brake lining — a type of powdered steel. They claimed asbestos dust was emitted into the atmosphere by the application of the brakes. This just isn't true," Filteau insists.

Filteau claimed there have been continuous attacks on the asbestos industry as being a primary cause of cancer.

"It has affected exports to the U.S. and Europe, but so far no substitutes have been found. Sweden wanted to ban asbestos imports for brake lining, but they haven't been able to come up with an alternative."

The present government in Quebec, Parti Quebecois (PQ), is seeking to increase local manufacture of finished products for export, rather than to provide asbestos fiber for shipment to manufacturers elsewhere. Export could apply to only a limited number of products, such as asbestos textiles, since the others would cost too much to export.

At present, only 2 per cent of asbestos fiber mined in Canada is turned into finished products.

The PQ claims that while the province is the single largest producer of asbestos, the profits are enjoyed by multinational corporations outside the province.

Several proposals by the PQ to rectify the situation range from outright nationalization of the industry to acquisition of controlling interests in asbestos-producing companies. But pressure within the PQ calling for nationalization of the industry has eased during the past few months.

The cost of nationalizing the asbestos industry would be astronomical, a luxury the debt-ridden government can ill afford at the present time. "Cost figures the PQ have been throwing around are too conservative," Filteau insists.

"Finance Minister Jacques Parizeau says it would cost \$150 million to nationalize the industry, but since 1969, Johns-Manville has invested that much alone in the company," says Marc-Andre Gosselin, director of public relations at Canadian Johns-Manville.