TESTIMONY OF CHIEF JAMES CROPPER

FIRE CHIEF, CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, OHIO,

902 GASTON AVE.
CAMBRIDGE, OHIO

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

MAY 5, 1989

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MY NAME IS JAMES CROPPER. I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT FOR TWENTY - SEVEN YEARS AND HAVE SERVED AS CHIEF OF THE DEPARTMENT SINCE 1983. I WANT TO THANK THE SUBCOMMITTEE FOR HOLDING THIS MOST IMPORTANT HEARING HERE IN CAMBRIDGE. THE TRANSPORTATION OF HAZARDOUS MATERIALS IS A MOST IMPORTANT MATTER THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL OF AFFECTING VIRTUALLY THE WHOLE COUNTRY.

AS CHIEF, I HAVE ATTENDED SEVERAL HAZARDOUS MATERIAL CLASSES GIVEN BY THE OHIO STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE. I HAVE BEEN ON THE SCENE OF SEVERAL HAZ-MAT INCIDENTS AND I KNOW JUST HOW DANGEROUS AND SERIOUS THEY CAN BE, ESPECIALLY FOR FIRST RESPONDERS. I AM SURE WE WILL ALL AGREE THAT THIS NATION CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THESE CHEMICALS, BUT WE MUST LEARN HOW TO PROPERLY HANDLE THEM AND DEAL WITH THEM IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY.

THERE ARE MANY PROPOSALS UNDER CONSIDERATION AS TO HOW TO INCREASE THE DEGREE OF SAFETY IN THE TRANSPORTATION OF HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, SOME BETTER THAN OTHERS. IN MY OPINION, THIS INDICATES THAT THE CURRENT METHOD USED IN ADDRESSING AN INCIDENT IS NOT SUFFICIENT AND NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED UPON. I FAVOR TWO SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS. FIRST, I BELIEVE THE MANUFACTURERS AND THE TRANSPORTERS OF THESE MATERIALS SHOULD HAVE TO POST A BOND, PERHAPS AS MUCH AS $100,000, IN ORDER TO COVER THE COST OF CLEAN-UP AND DAMAGES IF IT IS FOUND THAT THEY ARE LIABLE FOR THE ACCIDENT. SECONDLY, I AM FAMILIAR WITH LEGISLATION THAT HAS BEEN PROPOSED BY CONGRESSMAN DOUGLAS APPLEGATE CALLING FOR THE

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IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPUTERIZED CENTRAL REPORTING SYSTEM AND DATA CENTER. THIS APPEARS TO ME TO BE AN EXTREMELY GOOD IDEA THAT WOULD REPLACE THE CURRENT PLACARDING SYSTEM THAT IS REALLY QUITE INEFFECTIVE AND NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED UPON AT THE VERY LEAST.

I WANT TO RELAY TO YOU A SPECIFIC INCIDENT INVOLVING HAZARDOUS MATERIALS AND HOW SUCH AN INCIDENT IS DEALT WITH IN THE AVERAGE AMERICAN SMALL TOWN.

ON JUNE 2, 1987, AT APPROXIMATELY 3:27 A.M., WE RECEIVED A CALL FROM THE OHIO HIGHWAY PATROL INFORMING US THAT A TANKER TRUCK HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN AN ACCIDENT ON INTERSTATE 70. IT WAS NOT UNTIL WE REACHED THE SCENE THAT WE WE KNEW THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ACCIDENT OR THE MATERIAL INVOLVED, WHICH PROVED TO BE PHOSPHORUS TRI-CHLORIDE. AT 4:07 A.M., THE HIGHWAY PATROL NOTIFIED CHEMTREK WHO, IN TURN, NOTIFIED THE MANUFACTURER, MONSANTO. THE COMPANY THEN TELEPHONED US AND ADVISED US HOW TO CONTAIN THE LEAKING MATERIAL AND KEEP IT FROM RUNNING INTO WILLS CREEK, THE MAIN WATER SUPPLY FOR THE CITY.

AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT, MY DEPARTMENT HAD NO HAZ-MAT SUITS OR GLOVES. OUR BUDGET SIMPLY DOES NOT ALLOW FOR THIS KIND OF EXPENSE. SINCE THE ACCIDENT, HOWEVER, LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS HAVE CONTRIBUTED SOME $900 FOR THE PURCHASE OF 8 DISPOSABLE SUITS. THESE CAN ONLY BE USED ONE TIME, BUT WILL GIVE US AT LEAST SOME PROTECTION.

CHEMTREK DOES A FAIRLY GOOD JOB IN NOTIFYING THE MANUFACTURER, BUT THEY DO NOT HAVE MUCH MORE INFORMATION ON CHEMICALS THAN WE CAN

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GET FROM OUR HAZARDOUS MATERIALS GUIDEBOOK AS FAR AS WHAT TO USE TO COMBAT A CERTAIN CHEMICAL OR WHAT TO USE TO DECONTAMINATE OUR EQUIPMENT AND MANPOWER.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR HAZARDOUS MATERIALS MANUFACTURERS AND TRANSPORTERS, AND THE CONGRESS, TO REALIZE THE DANGER THESE CHEMICALS PRESENT TO THE LIFE AND PROPERTY. WE, AS FIREFIGHTERS, ARE TRYING TO DO OUR JOB TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC, BUT WE CANNOT DO IT UNLESS THE MANUFACTURERS AND TRANSPORTERS ARE FORCED TO RECOGNIZE THEIR LIABILITY INVOLVED WITH THESE MATERIALS. AS AN EXAMPLE, OUR CITY HAS NEVER RECEIVED ANY COMPENSATION FOR THE EXPENSES WE INCURRED IN DEALING WITH THE JUNE 2, 1987 SPILL. OUR LETTERS AND CALLS TO MONSANTO AND TO THE TRANSPORTING COMPANY, ROGERS CARTAGE COMPANY, HAVE BEEN IGNORED. THEIR ONLY RESPONSE IS THAT THEY ARE NOT LIABLE FOR THE SPILL. IN THE MEANTIME, OUR CITY, WHICH CANNOT EVEN AFFORD TO BUY DISPOSABLE HAZ-MAT SUITS, OR TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TRAINING, IS STUCK FOR $8,193.75.

AGAIN, MR. CHAIRMAN, I WANT TO THANK YOU AND THE MEMBERS OF YOUR SUBCOMMITTEE FOR COMING TO CAMBRIDGE AND FOR THE OPPORTUNITY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME TO PRESENT MY VIEWS. I HOPE THAT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM.

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