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(261)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
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"COMMISSIONER OF
PUBLIC HEALTH"

Mr. J. Boyland,
Senior Inspector of Mines,
Mines Department,
KALGOORLIE,
W.A.

25th October 1965.

Dear Mr. Boyland,

I recently visited Australian Blue Asbestos and was pleasantly surprised at many of the improvements made. However, dust is still obviously a problem and conditions, whilst much better, are still below that achieved in the gold mining industry.

New cases of silicosis and/or asbestosis are still being diagnosed each year, but there is room to hope that the length of exposure is increasing, and that men may work for longer periods with less chance of developing lung disease.

As you know, there has been much criticism of the konimeter as an instrument for dust sampling in the asbestos industry, and its continued use was only justified because counts were so high that more sophisticated instruments were unnecessary. I never really subscribed to this theory.

It is imperative now that more advanced methods of dust sampling be used, and I would be grateful if this could receive some attention. Dust sampling surveys should include:-

(a) The number of quartz particles of respirable size, i.e. less than 5 microns.

(b) The number of fibres of respirable size, i.e. less than about 40 microns.

(c) Allow some estimate to be made of the individual worker's total exposure.

I know that your inspectors (ventilation) are efficient and knowledgeable, and I don't wish to interfere in any way with your duties and responsibilities. However, Dr. Gordon Smith, Director of the Occupational Health Section of the Commonwealth School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, New South Wales, accompanied me to Wittenoom and offered to send his dust sampling inspector, Mr. B. Major, to do a detailed survey of the mine and mill at Wittenoom. I have heard Mr. Major spoken of very highly as an expert in this field. His survey would certainly be of value, and I think it would be a wonderful opportunity for your inspectors to widen their experience and perhaps develop new techniques, even if, in the end, you feel that his methods are impracticable and no improvement on present techniques. The question of cost hasn't been raised, but my impression is that the Commonwealth would finance it. There was no discussion in regard to timing, but a possible time might be April/May 1966.

A good example of the difficulty involved in dust sampling is Stubbs' Comet Mine at Marble Bar. His

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W.A.

25th October 1965.



treatment mill was very dusty in places, but it is possible that much of the dust is comparatively harmless because of the absence of quartz and the nature of the ore body.

Your comments on the above would be greatly appreciated. It might be that your ventilation inspectors don't feel that any purpose would be served by Mr. Major's visit. If so, let me know. No arrangements of any kind have been made.

Yours sincerely,

J. McNulty
PHYSICIAN
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

(113)

In reply to this or calling with reference to this letter please ask for

Mr. A.J.L. MURPHY

MINES DEPARTMENT

KALGOORLIE 21st July, 1965.

OUR REF.

YOUR REF.

AJM:LS

Dr. J. McNulty,
Physician,
Occupational Health Department,
PERTH.

Dear Jim,

Many thanks for sending up the Cassella Booklet covering the Hexhlet Sampler, which I am now returning.

Concerning the dust problem at Wittenoom, our Assistant Inspector Loxton has recently returned from an inspection trip of the Wittenoom and Comet mines and his report of Wittenoom mine and mill showed a considerable amount of fibre in the samples.

Of the 24 working places underground 7 samples recorded fibre, and in the lower section of the mill 4 samples out of 7 recorded showed fibre.

In the underground section, the fibre is, I think, picked up by the Primary airflow circuit coming through the old workings and picked up by the secondary ventilation appliances and blown into the current working places.

Conditions underground at Wittenoom have deteriorated over the past few months, due to the extreme pressures exerted on the brattices under the influence of the two exhaust fans working in parallel, and we are making tentative arrangements to do a further visit to Wittenoom with a view to relocating one of the Primary Exhaust Fans to try and reduce the pressure on the brattices

The School of Mines have agreed to lend us their Thermal Precipitator Dust Sampler for this trip, so that we can do some detailed sampling with their instrument.

I am going to contact the Department of Mines in Canada and South Africa to try and obtain any worthwhile information on their methods of asbestos dust sampling and suppression.

Yours sincerely,

A.J.L. MURPHY
INSPECTOR OF MINES.
(Ventilation)

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