B. McCord
cc: RMV

Re: Libby Questions

7164730

October 1, 1976

MEMORANDUM TO MR. J. PETER GRACE, JR.

Vermiculite Asbestos

You sent me a copy of the article from the Richmond Times-Dispatch of September 21, 1976, headlined "Doctors Call Vermiculite Potential Health Hazard", and asked:

"What's the net-net as you see the whole smear?"

The whole asbestos question as it relates to vermiculite is a very complex one. However, the net-net in my view is that we do have a potential problem with Libby ores if, in the future, OSHA reduces its current standard of 2.0 fibers per cubic centimeter of air (on an eight-hour time-weighted average), but not likely with South Carolina or Virginia ores. The standard was reduced from 5.0 fibers effective July 1, 1976. OSHA has proposed reducing the standard from 2.0 to 0.5 fibers, which is much tougher to meet. However, our present opinion is that this change will not be made because of the lack of evidence that the 2.0 fiber level is harmful and the impossibility of meeting the standard not only with vermiculite, but with iron ore, gold ore, and possibly copper ore and coal.

However, the possibility of further tightening of the standard does still exist and our people in CFD are concerned with this question. We have been actively working with the industry (Johns-Manville, for example) and the proper associations to forestall this.

PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT G-117235

7164731

Obviously, the problem is that publicity such as that in the attached article is bound to have some adverse effect, and conceivably, could make it more difficult to open the proposed Louisa County, Virginia mining operation. Also there is the possible impact of newspaper articles such as the one which you attached on customers, OSHA, and others.

The article quotes statements by people at Mt. Sinai Hospital that Libby ore contains "chrysotile" asbestos and neither we nor our consultants, Arthur D. Little, have ever seen any "chrysotile" asbestos in laboratory work. The form of asbestos present at Libby as a minor component in vermiculite ore is "sodic amphibole" asbestos, which reportedly has a lower carcinogenic risk than "chrysotile" asbestos. The South Carolina mine has only trace quantities of any asbestos-type fiber. The Virginia deposit is like South Carolina in this respect.

C. M. Graf

CMG:kab
cc: R. A. Clabeault
M. M. Vining
P. M. Rinaldo