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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter to Dr. Hamilton from Carl Obermaier

Carl F. Obermaier

15 North Harlan Street, -

York, Pa.

January 30, 1934.

Dr. Alice Hamilton,
Harvard School of Public Health,
55 Van Dyke Street, Boston, Mass.



Dear Doctor Hamilton,

In response to your letter of January 29th, I am glad to advise you that the York Plant of the General Electric Company, which specializes in asbestos insulations, has never experienced harmful results to its employees through continuously working with this material. This is chiefly due to the fact that we are not dealing with raw asbestos, but rather with a prepared fibre of fine quality which comes to us in a very clean condition.

I am also glad to report that all of our machines that fiberize our asbestos material are hooded and connected with an exhaust system. In other words, the atmospheric conditions existing in our plant could not be considered harmful to anybody, even to those who are constantly operating with this material. On the floor where we apply felted asbestos we have per shift about ten to twelve operators and in the braiding department about three or four operators.

Harmful conditions are found in asbestos mills where the raw asbestos is crushed and opened and where cheap mixes are produced. In such cases significant concentrations of asbestos dust can be found in the air and may result in the disease called asbestosis, provided preventive measures are not taken.

This question of asbestos affecting the health of our operators has come up previously and Dr. G. H. Cowle has written a treatise entitled "The Hazard of Asbestos in the Schenectady Plant of the General Electric Company". It may also be of interest to you, if you are not already acquainted, that the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has issued a pamphlet entitled "Effects of the Inhalations of Asbestos Dust upon the Lungs of Asbestos Workers". By writing to the Policyholders Service Bureau of this Company you, no doubt, can obtain a copy of this pamphlet.

Since you are evidently interested in Industrial Toxicology, we have another problem confronting us which is due to the use of hallowax. However, I would not like

Dr. Hamilton

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to bring this question to you as issuing from the Company, but simply as an interesting subject to study. I have already made a careful survey, and within a short time we expect to make the necessary arrangements to exhaust these vapors issuing from the tanks by providing hoods over each tank so that only a minimum of vapor escape is possible into the room.

These vapors, due to their originating from high melting point materials, condense upon the skin of the workers and, if deposited there in sufficient quantities, may cause the backing up of the sebaceous matter, due to the clogging of the pores, causing slight eruptions and blackheads. The cure evidently consists in keeping the skin clean and applying a layer of vaseline, castor oil or cold cream to the exposed parts of the body during working periods. It is, naturally, my aim to make these improvements as soon as possible in order to protect our employees from any possible inconvenience.

To return to asbestosis, may I suggest that you write a similar letter to the Bridgeport Works in which the atmospheric conditions are not nearly so good as in York. In this Plant a much more inferior asbestos material is used and at one of my visits I noticed considerable atmospheric contamination. It may be, however, that improvements have taken place.

Please do not hesitate to write me again in case I can be of further service to you in this study. Upon your request, I shall gladly furnish you a copy of Dr. Cowle's treatise.

Sincerely yours,

C. F. Hermaier

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