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New health guard for asbestos workers

A new body, formed yesterday, is to look into the health aspects of workers in the asbestos industry. Renewed public interest in the risks to health which may be associated with asbestos has been aroused by the drafting of revised Government regulations, prepared after consultations with the industry, to control the handling of asbestos in the docks, in factories and by industrial users.

The Asbestos Information Committee has been set up by four of Britain's largest asbestos companies —Turner & Newall, Cape Asbestos, B.B.A. Group, and Central Asbestos Company. Mr. John Waddell, chairman of the committee, said that the diseases thought to be associated with asbestos were lung cancer developing from a complaint known as asbestosis and a rare cancer form, mesothelioma, thought to be associated with blue asbestos.

Mr. Waddell, who is chairman of Turner Brothers Asbestos, said that conditions in British factories were the model for the rest of the world and the incidence of asbestos is over the last 30 years had almost been eliminated.

Steps which the committee has taken to reduce health risks include shipping of asbestos in dustproof bags and mechanically handled pallets for blue asbestos. It is estimated that 68 people died last year from cancer after working in contact with asbestos dust. As the total number of workers employed in the industry is about 25,000, this represent a very small proportion of fatalities. The committee pointed out yesterday that many of these deaths during the year were of workers employed in the industry for more than 25 years.

A sum of £100,000 has been allocated to the Asbestosis Research Council, a Government-run body, for an extended programme of research over the next five years into the ways of preventing risk to health. This is in addition to the £500,000 already being spent by the industry each year on research and medical services, and equipment for the protection of workers