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May 11, 1934

DEAR MR. SWOPE

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Gerard Swope, President
General Electric Company
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Swope, I am glad to hear of your interest in the matter of asbestos dust. You will perhaps remember that I wrote you last winter suggesting that an inquiry be made into the use of asbestos in General Electric plants because of serious trouble which has arisen recently in other plants using this material. You then instructed me to look into the matter and report to you later.

At the outset I assumed that the problem could be attacked in the same way as is the problem of silicon dust, namely, by an examination of the dust content of the air. But a consultation with Dr. L. U. Gardner, of Saranac, disclosed the fact that there are no data as yet with regard to the dangerous quantity of asbestos dust, and the only practical way of determining whether the amount in the air of any given factory is dangerous to be harmful is to examine men who have been exposed, especially at by means of X-ray pictures of the lungs. I went to work and found a fairly serious condition as regards asbestos dust in the Insulating Department, where "asbestos moving in lag form" is done and where some 24 men work during the four shifts. There is an exhaust over part of each belt machine, but these are far from adequate and it may be that only a completely enclosed apparatus which would prevent dust from escaping, would be adequate, for the fibres are light and fluffy and not easily stirred in by an exhaust. The draughts from the moving belts blow them about and they accumulate on surfaces higher than the men's heads. It is beyond doubt that the men breathe in some of this asbestos dust.

We discussed the question of taking X-rays of some of the older employees. I was reluctant to advise such a procedure if it would mean alarming the men and starting rumors of danger, but Mr. Obermeier was quite sure it would not. He offered to explain to the four men who have worked longest in that department (from 18 to 25 years) that the Company wanted to be sure the dust was not harmful and so wished to have the oldest employees examined. He said they were reasonable men and their relation to the Company was such that they would respond with entire confidence.

In Bridgeport I found a quite different situation

G.W.

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May 11, 1934

Enclosure, please Dr.
William H. Hays
May 11, 1934

not with regard to dust, for there is much here also, but with regard to the length of exposure. The men in Bridgeport have been exposed less than two years; therefore nothing would be revealed by an examination of them.

I discussed my investigation of York with Mr. Clark in Bridgeport, and he said he was perfectly willing to have the examination of the four old employees in that plant carried out.

The third place in which asbestos is used, Schenectady, is already under Dr. Vosburgh's supervision, and I did not take that up.

My conclusion is that there is in both York and Bridgeport an amount of asbestos dust large enough to be probably harmful and eventually cause trouble. The only way to determine if this is true is to see that effect years of exposure to it has had on those exposed. I would, therefore, advise you to authorize Mr. Overmeier to have X-ray pictures taken of the four men longest employed. This can be done in York, but the films should go to Dr. L. U. Gardner of Trudeau Sanatorium, Saranac Lake, New York, for interpretation. There is no one in York who is an expert in this field, and Gardner is the foremost one in the country.

I enclose a statement of time and expenses covering a two day conference in Saranac and visits to York and Bridgeport.

Sincerely yours,

Alice Hamilton M.D.

(Enc.)