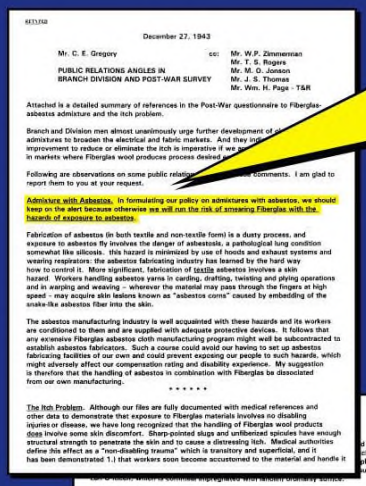
1943
Ames on Asbestos Hazards and Owen's Duty



December 27, 1943

Mr. C. E. Gregory

cc: Mr. W.P. Zimmerman
Mr. T. S. Rogers
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PUBLIC RELATIONS ANGLES IN
BRANCH DIVISION AND POST-WAR SURVEY

Attached is a detailed summary of references in the Post-War questionnaire to Fiberglas-asbestos admixture and the itch problem.

Branch and Division men almost unanimously urge further development of [illegible] admixtures to broaden the electrical and fabric markets. And they [illegible] improvement to reduce or eliminate the itch is imperative if we [illegible] in markets where Fiberglas wool produces process desired [illegible]

Following are observations on some public relat[illegible] comments. I am glad to report them to you at your request.

Admixture with Asbestos. In formulating our policy on admixtures with asbestos, we should keep on the alert because otherwise we will run the risk of smearing Fiberglas with the hazards of exposure to asbestos.

Fabrication of asbestos (in both textile and non-textile form) is a dusty process, and exposure to asbestos fly involves the danger of asbestosis, a pathological lung condition somewhat like silicosis. this hazard is minimized by use of hoods and exhaust systems and wearing respirators: the asbestos fabricating industry has learned by the hard way how to control it. More significant, fabrication of textile asbestos involves a skin hazard. Workers handling asbestos yarns in carding, drafting, twisting and plying operations and in warping and weaving - wherever the material may pass through the fingers at high speed - may acquire skin lesions known as "asbestos corns" caused by embedding of the snake-like asbestos fiber into the skin.

The asbestos manufacturing industry is well acquainted with these hazards and its workers are conditioned to them and are supplied with adequate protective devices. It follows that any extensive Fiberglas asbestos cloth manufacturing program might well be subcontracted to establish asbestos fabricators. Such a course could avoid our having to set up asbestos fabricating facilities of our own and could prevent exposing our people to such hazards, which might adversely affect our compensation rating and disability experience. My suggestion is therefore that the handling of asbestos in combination with Fiberglas be dissociated from our own manufacturing.

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The Itch Problem. Although our files are fully documented with medical references and other data to demonstrate that exposure to Fiberglas materials involves no disabling injuries or disease, we have long recognized that the handling of Fiberglas wool products does involve some skin discomfort. Sharp-pointed slugs and unfiberized spicules have enough structural strength to penetrate the skin and to cause a distressing itch. Medical authorities define this effect as a "non-disabling trauma" which is transitory and superficial, and it has been demonstrated 1.) that workers soon become accustomed to the material and handle it

Since May 1941 our health program has been built on these premises:

1. Find out the facts. (Our files have been centralized, complete related data have been assembled on insurance experience, investigation have been carried out: Siebert, Subberger, Sobmarts, Schols, etc.)
2. Get the facts into medical literature. (articles have been published in Industrial Medicine, American Journal of Surgery, Journal of the American Medical Association, Industrial Hygiene Digest, etc.)
3. Take the mystery out of the subject by making the facts available to members of our own organization and to the general public. ("Health Aspects" has been published and reprints of articles in medical journals made available for general distribution.)
4. Handle inquiries promptly and fully. (All bona fide inquiries have been answered with custom-made replies. Forms have been avoided.)
5. Concentrate on professional and technical "influence centers" - medical groups, safety engineers, industrial hygienists, plant physicians and nurses, public health authorities. These contacts have been made and are being cultivated.

This has been a slow process of education. Frequently [illegible] under the suspicion of being devil's advocates to get the order, and then [illegible] the health hazard has been discounted. Some Branch men, too, [illegible] health story to tell it in a forthright and accurate manner, still reflect a [illegible] attitude about the itch and local competitive conditions sometimes frustrate [illegible]

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Our efforts to combat the itch may be adequate in a seller's market, it is certainly that they will be inadequate in a Post-War buyer's market. In some cases we have been like the Dutch boy at the dike, trying to stem a competitive avalanche that threatens to engulf us. We can point with pride, however to the consistent effort we have made to treat the subject on its merits. We have nothing to hide, nothing to conceal. And where the itch has been a sales obstacle apparently ruling our material out of a job, the real reason has lain deeper, in a complex of local and national manufacturing, distribution, and application methods.

Behind such situations lies the fact that the Asbestos Workers Union has had long and perhaps unholy alliance with the magnesia manufacturers. Evidence in our files demonstrates

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