

FILE NAME: Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR)

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter to State Govt Insurance Office
from District Hospital, Kalgoorlie RE Asbestosis

(76)

DISTRICT HOSPITAL

KALGOORLIE

JMcN:EI.

Date 17th March, 1960.

The General Manager,
State Government Insurance Office,
184 St. George's Terrace,
PERTH.

Dear Sir,

Asbestosis.

Too few cases of Asbestosis have been diagnosed and the time of observation has been too short, to reply adequately to your request for information. There are many references to the problem in the World literature but the conclusions drawn are often vague and, occasionally, contradictory.

Insofar as the cases diagnosed in this State are concerned, the main difference between Asbestosis and Silicosis lies in the length of exposure to dust. It is rare nowadays to diagnose Silicosis in a gold miner with less than ten years mining, new cases diagnosed have an average of 15 to 20 years. Asbestosis has been diagnosed in six workers at Wittenoom and their average exposure to asbestos dust was approximately four years. All of these workers appear to have contracted the disease in the old mill, which is not now in use, and it is too early to assess the effect of the improved conditions of the new mill. However, a few underground workers have contracted a chest disease which appears to be a mixture of Silicosis and Asbestosis.

The amendment to the Mine Workers' Relief Act was necessary because otherwise workers disabled from Asbestosis would have been excluded from benefits. Since the broad term Pneumoconiosis in the Workers' Compensation Act includes Asbestosis there does not seem to be any need to specifically mention it unless benefit was to be effected in a different way. It is hoped that further investigation at Wittenoom will reduce the dust hazard to at least par with that existing in the gold-mining industry. If this cannot be assured then the brief exposure to asbestos dust required and the extent of disease so far noted might make it necessary to compensate and presumably insure workers exposed to this dust on a different scale to gold miners.

PLAINTIFF'S
EXHIBIT

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PER 10-1-1960, P. 1.

Certain experts claim that there is little, if any progression in Asbestosis when exposure to dust ceases, in contrast to Silicosis which, undoubtedly, can progress. It is hard to believe that the disease process is arrested if no further dust is inhaled, but once again it is too early to draw any conclusion for the cases diagnosed in this State.

There is statistical evidence to suggest that exposure to asbestos dust may cause lung cancer. The matter is controversial but lung cancer certainly appears to be more common in workers exposed to asbestos dust than comparably employed workers in other industries.

I forwarded a detailed report on the health of workers at Wittenoom to the Public Health Department in January, 1960. Dr. Letham, Physician, Public Health Department has a copy, and it would be worthwhile discussing it with him. He is also familiar with the general problem.

Finally, I am re-assured by your last sentence that your enquiry is purely exploratory and you have no definite purpose in mind. In the event of my being consulted, prior to amending the Workers' Compensation Act, I would inquire into the subject more closely.

Yours faithfully,

CHEST PHYSICIAN and
MINES MEDICAL OFFICER.

P.S. The delay in answering your letter was caused by my absence on leave.

Dr. D.D. Letham.