

FILE NAME: Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR)

DATE: 1961 Sept 25

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter to Dr. Rennie RE Wittenoom,
Asbestosis & Worker Safety Concerns with References to Drs.
Letham & McNulty and Medical Case Details

95

25th September 1961

Dr. G. Maynard Rennie, F.R.C.P., F.R.A.C.P.,
183 Macquarie Street,
SYDNEY. N.S.W.

My dear Ted,

I am both very surprised and very disappointed with your letter of 7th September. You ought to know me well enough to know that I don't start making a fuss until I am very sure of my facts. I have sent a copy of your letter to McNulty and to Letham and have asked them to provide you with such further information as you seek - they have shown me copies of their replies. I have, in the meantime, extended my enquiries to other sources. Russell and Davidson, Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner of Public Health, both speak of Wittenoom in blasphemous terms - "a festering sore" was one of the choicer expressions which came into the conversation. Bob Elphick, the very efficient Medical Superintendent of the Perth Chest Hospital, tells me that he has seen more serious chest disease from Wittenoom during the past five years than he has seen from all the gold mines of Western Australia in the past fifteen years. Purely by chance the State Government Insurance Office asked me three days ago to examine in hospital one a Yugoslav of 42. This man came to Australia in 1951, apparently in good health. He worked on a farm in New South Wales for two years, and thereafter in the timber industry in Western Australia for two years. He was still apparently in good health in 1955 when he was so unfortunate as to take a job at Wittenoom. His chest X-ray in that year (I have seen it) was perfectly clear. In 1958 his chest X-ray showed gross asbestotic changes. He is now dying of asbestosis in very considerable distress in the Chest Hospital - it is doubtful if he will live more than a few weeks. I think if the officers of the C.S.B. whose rather smug and self-satisfied statements to you are quoted in your first paragraph were to be compelled to look at Markovic and to hear him struggling for breath they would be a little less satisfied "that they have gone as far as they can with the present knowledge".

Dr. Letham has looked up the records of those cases of chest disease which have been sent to Perth from Wittenoom during the years 1956-61. He has so far traced 26 cases which he classifies as

Asbestosis	12
Probable asbestosis	3
	15
Silicosis	4 (one of whom has added tuberculosis)
Probable silicosis	6
	10
non-silicosis and asbestosis .	1
	11
Total	26

Patient name deleted
J. R. Rennie
27/9

PLAINTIFF'S
EXHIBIT
103470

Mr. H. Raymond Kennie.

26th September 1961

I have myself seen the X-rays of 6 of these cases, and can obtain access to the rest.

I recall that when I was interviewing Mr. Allan he told me that in the twelve years he had been at Wittenoom less than 10 cases of "dusting" had been brought to his notice - I quoted this in my report to you. If one takes this statement, puts it alongside the information with which you have been supplied in Sydney, and then on the other hand casts a glance at the figures supplied by Leithen, one comes up with the feeling either that the responsible officers of the Company have the ostrich instinct very strongly developed, or that the comment in my letter, which you quoted back to me and to which you took considerable exception, is nevertheless amply justified.

My dear Ted, this matter cannot possibly be allowed to rest. I gather from the senior Health Authorities that they have been trying for some considerable time to get the Company to realise and to remedy the situation - so far without much effect. It would obviously be much more satisfactory if the Company itself took the necessary action - which I suggest should start with an inspection by yourself and by a well-qualified ventilation engineer. After examining the evidence which has been produced for you I find it very difficult to believe that a reputable public Company could remain in its apparently self-satisfied state and continue to allow the asbestos mining industry to go on killing men unfortunate enough to be employed in it. If however the present situation is to remain unaltered I would feel it my bounden duty to bring the matter to the personal attention of the Premier. I would much prefer not to have to do this; I don't want to cause worry and possible distress to the very good friend of mine named Ronnie, and I prefer not to start a bout of public and slinging. Surely you will come and see for yourself - following which I am quite confident any further action on my part would be unnecessary.

Very sincerely,