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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH A FORMER EMPLOYEE OF HINDUSTAN FERODO, LTD.

Hindustan Ferodo, Ltd. manufactures a number of asbestos products at its factory in Bombay, India. The plant was built in 1956. Turner and Newall Ltd of Manchester, England—the largest asbestos enterprise in Western Europe—owns 74 percent of the share capital of Hindustan Ferodo. The interview which follows, conducted in March 1980, describes working conditions and business practices in the Bombay plant.

Q: What products are produced and how much?

A There are two divisions to the plant. One produces about 250 tons a month of brake and clutch linings. The other manufactures a wide variety of asbestos textiles, from heavy webbing mat to finer yarns (about 125 tons a month).

Q: Which were exported to where, and how much?

A: Production has been held to less than full capacity, despite ample demand. Domestic and export markets are strong, but there is a shortage of asbestos, which must be imported. Hindustan Ferodo imports about 95 percent of its asbestos, predominantly from Canada and, until recently, from Rhodesia. Most of the products are consumed domestically; about 5 to 10 percent are exported, with the major destinations being Sri Lanka and South Asia. Until two or three months ago, both textile and friction materials were shipped to the United Kingdom. However, this has stopped because of capacity problems and objections about inadequate packaging at British docks.

Q. Are the products labeled as to possible health hazards?

A. There's no indication on any product that it may be hazardous to health.

Q: I've been told that the products must be shipped in unmarked containers, as there have been problems unloading these shipments in the West. Is this true?

A. It is true that the company has been having problems, particularly with webbing and friction materials sent to the U.K., where there are very stringent packaging requirements. The products must be triple-packed in polyethylene so that there will be no leaks due to container damage during shipment. They weren't packaging it this well, and as a result several consignments were returned. They stopped exporting to the U.K. two or three months ago, for this reason [it increases the cost], and because they have such a domestic demand that they don't need to export to the United Kingdom. They haven't had any such problems in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, so they're not triple-packaging any shipments to those areas.

Q. Are the workers informed of the nature of the hazard and, if so, are they told of preventive measures?

A No, they're not told at all. Virtually no one is told, in fact. Not only are the

workers not told, but even management personnel are not informed about any workplace hazard. Ventilation systems are poorly maintained. Dust on the floors is just swept up dry with a broom, instead of a wet mop. The workers even have the idea, which management does nothing to dispel, that if you drink alcoholic drinks, the asbestos won't do you any harm. A lot of the workers are heavy drinkers.

Q: Are there workplace standards for asbestos fibers? If so, what are they and what is the penalty for non-compliance? Are the workplaces monitored regularly and how?

A: [He has no idea what standards there are or what the penalty is for non-compliance.] They do take dust counts on a relatively regular basis. The dust levels in many spots in the factory are easily visible, with much dust in the air in some of the operations. Hence, although there is some air monitoring, there appear to be no hygiene standards maintained.

Q: What protection is given to the workers?

A: The workers are given uniforms, which they leave at the shop and which are laundered every two to three days. The same locker is used for work clothes and street clothes, however. The fluffing and the carding operations are the most dusty. It's very visible, as dense as the dust in the air behind a bus on a dirt road in dry season. These areas are enclosed, and workers are supposed to wear respirators of the cannister type. However, they generally avoid this, because they're not given any indication that this dust is extremely hazardous. As far as they know, it's just very unpleasant to breathe because it's so thick. So the workers often avoid the respirators because of the discomfort of wearing the face masks for hours. It's only in these two operations, the fluffing and carding, that cannister-type respirators are provided. The rest of the workers in the plant are given cloths that resemble surgical masks—a piece of cloth tied around the head with strings. Except for top management officials who wear them every time they go into the work area, few employees use these devices. Generally, unless the dust is really a nuisance, clogging up the nose and so forth, no face mask is worn. There are no notices anywhere in the plant warning against the dangers of excessive dust inhalation.

There is also a sort of hazard pay scheme in effect. Workers in the fluffing operation and in the carding operation get a 5 percent "inconvenience allowance" (this has been in effect for the last two years). It's called an "inconvenience allowance" because they have to put up with the inconvenience of wearing respirators.

Q: What is the medical monitoring program and when was it implemented?

A: They've had medical monitoring since around 1970. Once or twice a year each production worker is screened. There is no screening for office personnel, and no one in the office is ever told anything about what the screening is for. Workers are simply taken off the job for a couple of hours, put in the company van and driven up to the medical building, given an X-ray and sent back. *The workers are not told of the results.* They just view it as a way of getting out of a couple of hours of work. The workers know nothing about the medical records kept by the company.

Q: How is asbestos dust generated, captured, and ultimately disposed of?

A: The plant is a fairly dusty place. Asbestos is received in polyethylene bags, which are cut open with a knife. The sack cutters do not wear dust respirators, though some wear the useless cloth masks. Workers slice the bags open, then they flip them over and empty them. The asbestos comes out like a block, and is tossed onto a conveyor belt which goes a short distance to the machinery. Overwhelmed exhaust ventilation is used in some dusty areas. All the suction ducts lead into a room outside of the plant. This equipment is designed to pack and seal the dust in polyethylene bags; unfortunately, jute bags are used instead, which leak dust profusely. The area is like a dust storm. "Outside" contract laborers are used in this area, and they are given no respiratory protection, no uniforms, no medical check-ups. They are completely covered in dust and look like they work in a flour mill, white from head to toe. The sacks of short-fiber waste dust are taken out by truck and just dumped nearby beside a small stream. In the last couple of months, the municipal council has objected to the dumping, and consequently big piles of pure asbestos wastes are accumulating in the factory yard.

Q: Are there ever visitors at the plant, who observe typical operations?

A: When visitors are expected, extra cleaning workers are hired, and the dustier operations are shut down for awhile to clean up the plant.

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