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Asbestos

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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON ASBESTOS

At the meeting on June 14, 1978, the Directors authorized the formation of a special Ad Hoc Committee on Asbestos. Such a committee is considered necessary to bring this expanding problem into focus and to exchange information on possible methods of dealing with present and past employees, Government agencies and the media.

Recent events suggest a heightening of potential problems and liabilities for shipyards:

- (1) The Asbestosis Questionnaire being circulated to present and former shipyard employees by the National Cancer Institute
- (2) The rapid increase in workers' compensation claims and negligence law suits in Naval shipyards (400-600) and to a lesser extent in private shipyards
- (3) The National Cancer Institute has hired Porter Novelli Marketing of Washington, DC to put together a public service campaign. Porter Novelli has in turn hired Bean/Kahn Films International, Inc. to produce television public service spot announcements, which are now being shown nation-wide.
- (4) The ABC-TV News Close-up special on July 4, 1978: "The Way to Dusty Death", narrated by Jules Bergman.
- (5) The Department of Health, Education and Welfare announced in August 1978, that a new public information project will be targeted at 16 "high priority" locations, mainly ports and shipbuilding facilities before and during World War II. Emphasis is to be placed on articles in military, retirement, union, and industrial publications. Information also will be sent to social security beneficiaries.
- (6) The Navy plans to provide medical examinations for an estimated 150,000 uniformed personnel and 72,000 civilians who have been exposed to asbestos.
- (7) Representative Frederick Richmond (D-NY) has introduced a bill (HR-13461) which would provide \$55 million for medical screening of workers exposed to asbestos. The bill also provides for testing workers' relatives who lived in the same household during time of exposure.

The newly formed Ad Hoc Committee on Asbestos held its first meeting on August 8, 1978. The first part of the meeting was devoted to a briefing by U.S. Navy repre-

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on the status of asbestos awareness and control programs within the naval establishment. This was followed by a roundtable discussion in closed session lead by Chairman, David R. Lavalette on problems associated with defining, controlling and compensating asbestos related diseases. The Committee decided to concentrate its initial efforts on estimating the industry's potential liabilities from asbestos related claims. Accordingly, a survey of the membership is presently in progress to gather information on the size of the workforce since 1941, and the number of workers' compensation claims and third party actions filed against shipyards. A worst case approximation can then be developed by applying widely published estimates of future disease incidence rates to actual employment levels over past years. Actual claims and litigation experience may prove useful in identifying trends which could indicate if a legislative remedy should be pursued.

The Ad Hoc Committee intends to maintain liaison with the Navy, the Asbestos Information Association and other organizations having compatible interests.