FILE NAME: Drywall Spackling Compounds (DWSC)

DATE: 1976 Mar 29

DOC#: DWSC022

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Barry Castleman Notes

Use of Spackle Compound in the U.S.

U.S. Gypsum is one outfit that dropped the use of asbestos in spackle after the publication of the Rohl paper in Science. I got a lawyer at the home office in Chicago, Mike Helton (312-321-3973), and told him I would like his firm's estimate of the size of the U.S. market for spackle. He mentioned that the material has a very long shelf life, he had recently seen a 1967 package on store shelves. His firm has for years been trying to get out of the asbestos business, and hopes to accomplish that in a few months. However, substitutes have fared poorly in the marketplace when introduced in competition with customary asbestos-containing products. It is obvious that pressure from CPSC could much improve the prospects for development and marketing of asbestos-free materials.

Our petition should also request manufacturers to recall spackle (etc.) and refund purchase price to consumers. This can be done under the Hazardous Substances Act, if not under CPS Act. (both administered by CPSC)

Update: Helton says USG does not know its market share, owing to the large number of small manufacturers of spackle. USG has no estimate of annual U.S. consumption....He said we may have some trouble even defining spackle; there is an in-between patching compound used for plaster work.

At the Commerce Dept., I came up with Mr. Ross in the Bureau of Domestic Commerce (967-3529). There is no listing for spackle, but under Paints and Allied Products is "wood fillers and sealers" (SIC # 2851). The 1972 Census of Manufacturers, put out by the Bureau of the Census in 1974, lists this category as 9.3 million gallons for the year, and with a value of $22.3 million. This is the class of which spackle, patching, and taping compounds are a sub-class. This is the extent of information available from Commerce.

Frank Burkart is a researcher at the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades, 1750 New York Av., Washington 20006 (202-872-1444), and he is a secretary on a labor-industry committee. His union has worked for 3 years to get the companies to remove asbestos from spackle, etc. Unfortunately, the union's health efforts have run into slow times and there is 35% unemployment, in these trades. One problem with removing asbestos is the loss of an all-weather quality to the product. USG is formulating separate mixtures to sell in the various parts of the U.S. Frank said most of the things his workers use are also consumer goods, and was very interested in getting together a joint effort with us on this petition. I said I'd return soon with a draft of the petition.

(finally got figures - over)

National Retail Hardware Association, Indianapolis, has compiled figures for sales of "patching compounds", for 1971. The 1975 data will be out in a month, but this can be projected now. Ms. Joeann Hixon gave these figures for sales:

type of outlet	number and % of outlets selling pc's, 1971	sales, 1971
hardware stores	86% (0.86 x 25,266 = 21,729)	$ 2.1 million
home centers	90% (0.90 x 4,269 = 3,842)	$ 1.4 million

The volume for all hard goods has gone up 67% from 1971 to 1975. A reasonable projection for the increase in sales of patching compounds can be made using the same multiplier. So, projected or estimated 1975 sales becomes:

hardware stores	$ 3.5 million
home centers	2.4 million
	$ 5.9 million

The other salient statistic, I think, is the large number of places that sell the patching compounds - over 25,000 retail outlets in 1971.

These figures do not account for all the sales of patching compounds. Contractor sales, for example, are sold separately in many cases. I do not know if this listing is specific to the class of materials we are concerned about - some types of things like joint sealing compounds may not be counted. And other patching materials that I do not suspect of having asbestos - like fake-wood goo that is used to cover up a nailhead - may be counted in this "patching" category. But overall, it looks like an excellent fix on the volume of asbestos-suspect patching materials sold to consumers.

Ms. Hixon is very cooperative, but I do not know if she knows much more than is here. Her number is 317-634-3441.

3/29/76