



August 1, 1986

Legal Section  
Industrial Commission of Ohio  
246 North High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Re: O.D. 901120-22  
James A. Westfall  
Owens-Corning Fiberglas  
Corp.  
Newark, OH 43055

Attn: Judy Spencer

Dear Ms. Spencer:

On April 22, 1986 an unannounced visit was made to the Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation's Newark plant to determine the conditions under which the claimant worked. Scheduled return visits were made on May 1, 1986 at the Newark plant and June 16, 1986 at the Fiberglas Tower offices in Toledo, for further questioning. Mr. Gary Chambers, an industrial hygienist with the Division of Safety and Hygiene assisted on the second visit.

Contacted at the company were:

|                                                                                          |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Ms. Valerie Gast, Workers' Compensation<br>Administrator, Newark Plant                   | 4-22-86           |
| Mr. Thomas Mullady, Safety Supervisor,<br>Newark Plant                                   | 5-1-86            |
| Mr. Gerald Devitt, Chief Industrial Hygienist,<br>Fiberglas Tower, Toledo, Ohio          | 5-1-86<br>6-16-86 |
| Ms. Jean A. Chapman, M.D., Corporate Medical<br>Director, Fiberglass Tower, Toledo, Ohio | 6-16-86           |

Listed on the claims application was: allergic pneumonitis affecting the lungs and throat, (which the company termed "basement flu").

Ms. Gast supplied the following information from the personnel files:

Pre-employment

|                   |                                               |                              |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 11-1-64 to 1-1-65 | Farmers' Feed and Supply<br>McConnellsville   | Truck driver                 |
| 6-1-64 to 9-1-64  | State of Ohio Highway Crew<br>McConnellsville | Flagman                      |
| 9-1-63 to 12-1-63 | Majestic Contractor, Inc.<br>Canada           | Spot painter<br>and skid boy |

Employment at Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation

|                           |                         |                            |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Date of hire 5-18-65      | Wool packing department | Handyman                   |
| 9-27-65                   | Filters department      | Standard Crewman           |
| 1-31-66                   | Wool packing department | Handyman                   |
| 12-19-69                  | Wool packing department | Selector/packer            |
| 8-28-72<br>to the present | Craft service           | Sheet metal<br>apprentice* |

\*Became sheet metal journeyman on 3-10-77.

A written job description for craft service/journeyman is enclosed.<sup>1</sup> According to Ms. Gast, the claimant received a pre-employment physical which included a chest x-ray.

According to the medical notes in the claim file, the claimant's symptoms included: cough, tightness of chest, shortness of breath, chest pain, headache, wheezing, and nausea.

According to the Division of Safety and Hygiene's records, no surveys have been conducted in the wool basement (building #8) by the Division, contrary to a statement in the claim file of such a survey. An Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) compliance officer inspected the wool basement in 1981 and reported high levels of coliform in the water. (See Enclosure 2.) Enclosure 3 is information obtained from OSHA through the Freedom of Information Act.

On June 13, 1986, the claimant was contacted by telephone. He stated that after the incident on November 13, 1985, he has been on medical leave, (11-20-85 to the present). He stated that on 11-13-85, he was inside a fan housing approximately 3 feet deep and 7 feet in diameter. A welder stood outside the housing cutting bolts with an acetylene torch. According to the claimant, the welder's body blocked

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his supply of incoming air, and further, the incoming air was "stagnant" from the penthouse. There was reportedly no source of fresh air into the housing until the claimant asked that an air hose be placed inside.

Since one side of the fan housing is removed when an employee must position himself inside the housing, Mr. Devitt stated that the company does not consider this to be a "confined space".

According to Mr. Devitt no industrial hygiene monitoring has been done in the breathing zone of a worker inside a fan housing to monitor for metal fume exposure. It is possible that the syndrome of metal fume fever could be contracted during elevated exposures to magnesium oxide, copper oxide, and zinc oxide fumes and dust during welding and cutting operations. Metal fume fever from any of the three oxides listed yields analogous symptoms.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) book Occupational Diseases - A Guide to Their Recognition, 1977, p. 409 states:

"The syndrome of metal fume fever is the only important effect of exposure to freshly formed zinc oxide fumes and zinc oxide dusts of respirable particle size. The fumes are formed by subjecting either zinc or alloys containing zinc to high temperatures. Typically, the syndrome begins four to twelve hours after sufficient exposure to freshly formed fumes of zinc oxide. The worker first notices the presence of a sweet or metallic taste in the mouth, accompanied by dryness and irritation of the throat. Cough and shortness of breath may occur, along with general malaise, a feeling of weakness, fatigue, and pains in the muscles and joints. Fever and shaking chills then develop. Fever can range from 102 to 104 F. Profuse sweats develop and the fever subsides. The entire episode runs its course in 24 - 48 hours. During the acute period, there is an elevation of the leukocyte count (rarely above 20,000/ml), and the serum LDH may be elevated. Chest x-rays are not diagnostic.

Metal fume fever produces rapid development of tolerance or shortlived relative immunity. This may be lost, however, over a weekend or holiday, and the worker may again develop the complete syndrome when he returns to work if fume levels are sufficiently high. There are no sequelae to the attacks.

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Other possible systemic effects of zinc oxide are in doubt. Cases of gastrointestinal disturbance have been reported, but most authorities agree there is no evidence of chronic industrial zinc poisoning."

Mr. Westfall stated that approximately once per week, someone must work in a confined area while welding is being done. He further stated that he had basement flu symptoms approximately five times prior to the 11-13-85 incident, although the symptoms were worse on the last incident.

Dr. Chapman stated that according to medical tests the claimant had contacted hypersensitive pneumonitis in the past. However, she said the illness is just like any flu; the symptoms are not chronic. She said that the claimant may be more susceptible to irritants in the workplace than the "average" worker. Dr. Chapman referenced a May 29, letter concerning Mr. Westfall from Dr. Brooks, University of Cincinnati, to Dr. Cairns, Owens-Corning Newark plant.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1970's, several of the wool-basement craft service employees started getting flu-like symptoms. A "basement flu" committee was formed, and later disbanded in 1982 or 1983.

Enclosure 5, supplied by Mr. Devitt, documents the company's knowledge of "basement flu" and the attempts at abating the problems, including requiring the use of 3M 9920 disposable dust/fume/mist respirators.

In conclusion, medical records documented that the claimant had "basement flu" (i.e. hypersensitive pneumonitis). The onset of metal fume fever can not be discounted. However, neither basement flu nor metal fume fever are considered to be chronic diseases.

Respectfully submitted,

*Beth Purcell*  
Beth Purcell  
Industrial Hygienist

BP/dk

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Enclosures:

1. Written job description.
2. O/C inter-office memo concerning OSHA inspection of wool basement.
3. Freedom of Information response from OSHA concerning wool basement inspection.
4. May 29, 1986 letter from Dr. Brooks, University of Cincinnati to Dr. Cairns, O/C Newark plant, concerning Mr. Westfall's medical data.
5. "Basement flu" information supplied by Mr. Gerald Devitt, chief Industrial Hygienist.