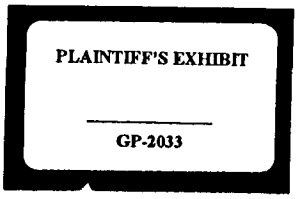
June 29, 1973

Mr. O. T. Burch — Portland

G. T. Ishmert — Tigard

INFORMATION BULLETIN ON ASBESTOS FIBER
IN JOINT COMPOUND



cc: Mr. C. T. Ilcon - Portland
Mr. D. C. Corkill - Tigard

Enclosed is a draft of a letter explaining why we are putting the asbestos caution label on some of our joint system bags. Hopefully a letter along these lines will permit our field sales people to respond to any inquiries about asbestos fiber.

C. M. L.

CML:jg

Enclosure: Draft letter

Proposed letter to field sales concerning asbestos fiber in joint system products.

There may be some curiosity and questions from our customers concerning the caution label we are currently placing on many of our joint system products. The label reads:

Caution

Contains Asbestos Fibers

Breathing dust may cause serious bodily harm

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has required all products containing asbestos fiber to be identified in this manner. The concern is the breathing of air which contains asbestos fiber. The degree of hazard is dependent upon the concentration of fiber in the air and the duration of exposure. The health problems associated with exposure to asbestos fiber have occurred in industries where workers have been exposed to high concentrations of the fiber over a period of years.

All joint compound manufacturers use asbestos fiber as an essential ingredient in their products. These compounds, however, contain relatively small amounts of asbestos (2-8%). We are not aware of any health problems in our industry but we are nevertheless required to comply with the OSHA requirements. The standards imposed on our plants are very stringent. There are severe limitations on allowable concentrations of asbestos in the air; strict procedures

for handling the asbestos; a mandatory program for wearing protective devices (respirators); periodic medical examinations; the labeling already described and many other very restrictive measures.

We are not aware of any OSHA regulations covering the use of joint compounds. It is recognized that there is some exposure to asbestos fiber during the mixing of the dry products and in the sanding of the joints. It is not presently known whether the concentrations of asbestos fiber at these times is in the hazardous range established by OSHA. The Gypsum Association is planning some tests to monitor levels of asbestos fiber in the air during the mixing and sanding of joint compounds. In the meantime it would probably be advisable for workers engaged in these operations to wear respirators. Once wetted or mixed the fiber is not subject to becoming airborne. Ready mix, for example, presents no hazard for the user, other than perhaps the sanding.

We are taking the necessary steps at our plants to comply with the OSHA requirements. However, the best overall solution is to eliminate asbestos from our products. Our first efforts were with textures because the spray application presented some special problems. We are about 90% converted to non-asbestos texture formulas. We are now directing our attention to our dry and ready mixed joint compounds.

We regard the development of low asbestos or non-asbestos products as a necessary step to expand our sales of joint compounds.

This reformulation will undoubtedly require a lot of field testing so we will need the cooperation of field sales personnel. In the meantime, we hope this information helps answer any questions prompted by the caution label on our bags.