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SHIPBUILDING COMMISSION 23

of the 7

NATIONAL WAR LABOR BOARD 24

In the matter of:

THE AMERICAN SHIP BUILDING COMPANY :

and

: CASE NO. 25-467

Eleven International Unions
Affiliated with the AMERICAN
FEDERATION OF LABOR :

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SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN SHIP
BUILDING COMPANY ANSWERING "PROPOSAL
(ADDITIONAL)" PRESENTED BY UNITED BROTHERHOOD
OF CARPENTERS AND JOINERS OF AMERICA AT THE
OPEN HEARING BEFORE THE SHIPBUILDING
COMMISSION ON OCTOBER 7, 1943.

The Union, without previous notice to the employer, presented an additional proposal at the time of the open hearing before the Shipbuilding Commission on October 7, 1943 requesting compensation at the rate of time and one-half the basic rate of pay for the trade employed for work involving the installation of fiberglass. The Shipbuilding Commission at that time granted the employer the right to file with the Commission any information which it might wish to submit concerning this proposal.

Reasons advanced by Union

In its proposal the Union based its request on two claims:

- (A) That fiberglass is a skin irritant.
- (B) That fiberglass affects the mucus tissues of the mouth and throat and the lungs.

Company's Position

(A) No authorities are cited in the Union's proposal in its statement that fiberglass is a skin irritant, although the statement is made that "leading medical authorities" have established that fact.

The following are merely examples of innumerable statements concerning this subject by eminent and widely accepted medical authorities refuting the Union contention.

"The irritation of the skin from contact with glass fibers is of a purely transitory and superficial nature. Only the immediate skin areas in contact with or rubbed with glass wool are slightly irritated, accompanied by a slight thickening of the skin, lasting as most for a few days. Minute pieces sticking to the skin and appearing to be superficially embedded are readily removed by ordinary washing with water." (Source - Memorandum dated December 30, 1942 to the Commandants of all Naval Districts, the Commandants of all Navy Yards, U. S. Navy, the commanding officers of all tenders and repair ships and all Industrial Managers, U. S. Navy from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, U. S. Navy Department.)

"All of the reactions observed were of a transitory and superficial nature. The only part of the reactions which persisted for more than a few days were slight redness and brownish pigmentation of the skin. The latter was sometimes apparent for several weeks. No reactions or symptoms outside the rubbed skin areas were observed at any time during the experiment.

"The pieces of material which were seen sticking to the skin after rubbings with Fiberglas in its wool-like form appeared to be very superficially embedded. This observation was borne out by the fact that ordinary washing with water easily removed a large part of the spicules remaining in the skin after rubbing.

"No definite sensitization to any of the materials could be demonstrated. In a few subjects there were a few mild and evanescent reactions to several of the materials, but it appeared very questionable whether these reactions were based on specific sensitization." (Source - Report of investigation published in October 1942 issue of "Industrial Medicine" by Doctors Sulzberger and Baer of investigation of the effects of fiberglas on the skin of laboratory animals and human volunteers.)

(B) As to the Union contention that the use of fiberglass affects the mucous tissues of the mouth, throat, and lungs, we note below examples of eminent medical authorities on the subject:

"Because of the physical characteristics of glass wool the hazard-producing damage to the human lung is practically nil.

"No cases of silicosis or other disabling changes in the lung have been brought to the attention of the Division of Industrial Hygiene of the National Institute of Health in association with the handling of glass wool or glass fibers.

"It is concluded from observations, investigations and available literature that there is no appreciable health hazard associated with the handling of fibrous glass and slag wool in the blanket or board form." (Source - Memorandum dated December 30, 1942 to the Commandants of all Naval Districts, the Commandants of all Navy Yards, U. S. Navy, the commanding officers of all tenders and repair ships and all Industrial Managers, U. S. Navy from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, U. S. Navy Department.)

"For your information, we recognize diseases of the respiratory tract as compensable occupational diseases, such as silicosis, asbestosis, anthracosis and siderosis. As a matter of fact, there is a provision under the new law, to recognize any disease of this type which is caused by the inhalation of any injurious dusts.

"We endeavor to keep a complete statistical record in the Department of Safety and Hygiene of all cases of this type. I have made a thorough check with this Department, and to date we have never had a claim filed for a disease of the upper respiratory tract caused by the alleged inhalation of fibreglass particles." (Source - The Industrial Commission of Ohio letter of June 17, 1941 to Dr. Walter Seibert, 2415 N. King's Highway, St. Louis, Mo.)

"The apparent lack of pulmonary damage from exposure to glass wool dust is demonstrated by an inhalation experiment." (Source - Annual report of the Saranac Laboratory for the Study of Tuberculosis for the year 1940.)

"We (the Saranac Laboratory) have been studying the effect of inhaled glass wool. Apparently even the finest textile glass set up as atmospheric dust is not inhaled in appreciable concentrations and does not produce any dangerous effects upon the lungs." (Source - Researches of Mellon Institute 1940-1941)

In refutation of the reasons advanced by the Union, we particularly direct your attention to the attached letter from the U. S. Maritime Commission to this Company and the enclosure therewith, which we believe conclusively dispose of all of the contentions made by the Union on this issue.

THE AMERICAN SHIP BUILDING COMPANY

By _____
President

UNITED STATES MARITIME COMMISSION 23

Chicago 4, Illinois 11

September 15, 1943

Mr. Leo Heller
Director of Labor Relations
American Ship Building Company
1410 Terminal Tower
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Mr. Heller:

Reference is made to the recent grievance of workers engaged in the installation of Fiberglas because of an alleged industrial health hazard. I enclose herewith five copies of the report of Kenneth Nelson, Industrial Health Consultant, and Mr. Raymond Clow, Safety Consultant. These gentlemen are attached to the Labor Relations Staff of the Great Lakes Regional Office, but represent both the Navy Department and Maritime Commission in their respective specialized fields.

The Maritime Commission will not consider premium rates for Fiberglas installation as a reimbursable item allowable in cost. We suggest that the recommendations contained in the enclosed report be followed as a preventive means for alleviating the alleged hazard.

Yours truly,

Herbert Wenzel
Regional Industrial Advisor

Enclosures (5)

UNITED STATES MARITIME COMMISSION 33
315 So. Michigan Avenue 23
Chicago, Illinois (4) 21

September 13, 1943

To: Messrs. W. E. Spofford, F. L. Hultquist, H. Wenzel
From: Lt. Ken Nelson - Mr. Raymond Clow
Subject: Meetings at the Cleveland and Lorain yards of the American Shipbuilding Co. concerning possible hazards to health of work with Fiberglas insulation.

At the request of Mr. Leo Heller, Labor Relations Director of the American Shipbuilding Co., the regional health and safety consultants met with workmen and union representatives of the two yards to discuss the hazards of working with Fiberglas. Meetings were held at 12:30 P.M., September 9th, Lorain, and at 4:00 P.M. the same day at Cleveland.

Workmen were concerned with possible lung damage or silicosis from inhaling fine particles of Fiberglas. It was pointed out that extensive research has shown that the nature of Fiberglas prevents it from causing silicosis or any other ailment.

The second complaint was the annoyance of itching due to particles of Fiberglas thread on the surface of the skin. This effect is an inherent property of Fiberglas, though it has been found that workmen acquire an "immunity" by working with it after a week or two of work. A very few individuals are extremely sensitive and, if they become used to it, and, in that event, should be transferred to a different job.

Medical studies of skin effects have concluded that "all reactions observed were of a transitory and superficial nature -- Minute particles sticking to the skin and appearing to be superficially imbedded are readily removed by ordinary washing with water."

To eliminate the annoying effects workmen were advised to institute the following measures:

1. Thorough clean-up with "Lan-O-Kleen", a corn meal lanolin soap which has been found to be effective and which has been made available by the management.
2. Long-sleeved shirts and trousers, preferably of a material with a tight weave, should be worn. Well-starched shirts are claimed to be of assistance.
3. Work clothes should be removed at the end of the shift and changed into street clothes before leaving the yard. Work clothes should be washed separately from home laundry.
4. If possible, showers should be taken instead of tub baths. If the problem continues, management should consider the installation of shower facilities at the yard.
5. Fiberglas materials should be handled lightly. Good housekeeping and clean up of scrap pieces on the job should be maintained.

Management's part should be to continue to provide "Lan-O-Kleen" and to allow time for clean-up and showering facilities. It should also consider other facilities - including hot water and, possibly, a small laundry for workmen.

SHIPYARDS
AMERICAN SHIPBUILDING COMPANY

