

FILE NAME: Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR)

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter to Undersecretary for Mines from the State Mining Engineer with History of Operations at Wittenoom Gorge & an Action List for Improving Conditions

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UNDER SECRETARY FOR MINES:

Mr. Boyland and myself met Dr. Letham and Dr. McNulty in conference at 10 a.m. on Tuesday 10th October.

The history of operations at Wittenoom Gorge was outlined as follows.

The industry was started in 1943 and under the conditions existing in the years immediately after the War all materials were in short supply.

The plant was built under very difficult conditions as regards materials, labour and technical services.

The original plant was dusty and unsatisfactory.

Reconstruction was not practically possible and this position was generally accepted as is evidenced by the issue of an Arbitration Court Award which took into account the dusty conditions in the plant.

As a long range project it was decided to rebuild the plant completely.

During the ensuing years it was found that better grade fibre was available in Colonial Gorge and the new plant was built there.

Since that time there has been an increased demand for asbestos and because of this and also because of some decrease in grade the mine has been called upon for more ore than the development position provides for.

The position has perhaps been aggravated by a lack of forward planning due to dislocation caused by staff changes.

A list of miners from Wittenoom Gorge who have been affected by silicosis, and/or asbestosis was produced by Dr. McNulty and is attached.

This list indicates that in certain cases advanced asbestosis can develop in as little as three years.

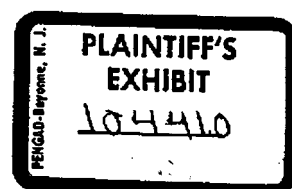
Since some of these cases have worked only in the new plant it appears that even under the conditions that now exist, which are very much better than those in the old plant, there must still be a very serious risk.

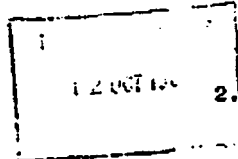
In the afternoon we were joined by Mr. Thomas of Australian Blue Asbestos.

Ways and means of determining the level of pollution in various places were discussed.

Mr. Thomas informed us that the method of dust control in the plant was to be examined by Gregory & Co., who are specialists in dust handling and that further changes will probably be made.

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Whole section is
always in good condition 72
SPT condition - 9 inches covered
must sample dust particles
Blue lot to find -
Rutledge - a very hard

Although some criticism of the konimeter as a method of dust determination was voiced it was decided to establish a system of dust records based on konimeter counts.

This decision rests on the grounds that we have the equipment and operators readily available and that the instrument is practical for underground use.

We should be able to demonstrate some improvement in underground conditions as the development openings are advanced and new equipment is installed.

Our officers will go to Wittenoom and will coach the mine ventilation officers in the use of the konimeter after which we will expect records of the dust concentration at all working places at regular intervals.

The members of this conference will meet again in 3 months time and progress will be reported.

Our officers became aware of bad conditions underground a little over a year ago and since that time we have made several inspections.

Our ventilation section has been strengthened principally to cope with the position at Wittenoom.

The Senior Inspector of Mines will visit the mine and a programme to enforce the use of secondary ventilating equipment will be worked out with the District Inspector of Mines and the Workmen's Inspector.

It is expected that Dr. McNulty will be available as full time medical officer for mining within one year.

Increased medical supervision including clinical investigation at Wittenoom is anticipated as a result of this arrangement.

In the mean time there will be the fullest exchange of information between our Department and the Public Health Department.

E. L. Prichard
STATE MINING ENGINEER.

EEB:JW:
12th October, 1961.

Ask P.H. for McNulty to accompany an Inspector
to Wittenoom on inspection.

S. H. Brown report