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Asbestos has been known to man since antiquity being found in varying amounts throughout the earth's crust. The mineral came into great industrial use about a hundred years ago. The remarkably strong, heat, fire and corrosion resistant fibers were ideal for insulating the machines of the industrial revolution. Large asbestos deposits in Canada, South Africa and Russia were developed after the turn of the century to meet increasing demands. World production grew from 50 tons in 1877 to more than 4 million tons in 1986 for use in building and friction materials, textiles, cement, plastics and numerous other products and industrial applications. In some of its applications, asbestos has no substitute. It is an essential industrial material.

Several years ago it was learned that the dust which could be generated from the processing of asbestos could result in the respiratory disease asbestosis. Asbestos dust has also been directly related to the incidence of lung cancer and mesothelioma among asbestos workers. Full knowledge of these diseases has been slow to develop because of long latency periods, possible multi-causes, and lack of medical histories. Dust control technology and worker protection from excessive exposure advanced as increased information became available about asbestos-related disease. Most asbestos producers and processing companies have had dust control and worker protection programs for many years.

Because asbestos is ubiquitous, and as a result of research following excessive exposures to asbestos dust particularly during World War II, it presented an engrossing example of a risk-to-health substance as focus on man's environment — the air he breathes, the water he drinks, the conditions of his workplace, and the products available to him that might be harmful — emerged in the early 1970's. Asbestos as a source of occupational disease became the subject of numerous medical papers and stories in news media with resultant general public concern. Regulation of exposure to asbestos dust, as with many other substances known to affect health, has been undertaken by various nations throughout the world.

AIA/NA recognizes the health problems associated with excessive exposure to asbestos dust. The Association dedicates its efforts to control of this potential health hazard so that the benefits derived from the use of asbestos may continue to be enjoyed.

AIA/NA Is Established

In December 1970, the Asbestos Information Association/North America (AIA/NA) was founded by a small group of asbestos companies in the United States and Canada.

At the time AIA/NA was established, new government agencies were formulating programs to regulate and control materials deemed hazardous to health. Asbestos was named one of these materials and it was to follow that a standard for worker exposure to asbestos dust would be the first emergency standard and first permanent standard under the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. AIA/NA filled the gap for the asbestos industry to have a representative organization to obtain and disseminate authoritative information concerning asbestos and the asbestos industry with emphasis on safety, health and environmental issues.

AIA/NA uniquely represents the interests of the asbestos industry in North America. The services of AIA/NA are available to product-oriented trade groups associated with the industry and other interested parties.

Organization of the Association

AIA/NA is an incorporated, non-profit organization established for educational and scientific purposes. Any firm or corporation engaged in the manufacture, sale or use of products containing asbestos fiber, or in the mining, milling or sale of asbestos fiber, in North America is eligible for membership in the Association.

The affairs of the Association are conducted through the direction of its board of directors duly elected from the designated representatives of its member firms. An executive committee is empowered to perform those functions delegated by the directors, including guidance for the day-to-day business of the Association as performed by its president and staff. Regular meetings of the directors are held, generally on a quarterly basis. Committees meet as necessary to provide study and advisory functions for the Association. The annual meeting of the AIA/NA is held in September at which time officers of the Association are elected.

The work of the Association is funded from dues of its members based on a percentage of cost of fiber purchased for use in the manufacture of products or, in the case of miners, percentage of price of fiber sold. Asbestos brokers are eligible for regular membership and their dues are based on a flat fee. Associate members, those who do not use raw asbestos fiber in the processing of asbestos-containing products, are also assessed a flat fee.

AIA/NA Objectives

These are the objectives of the Association:

- To provide industry-wide information on the asbestos-health relationship, and on industry efforts to eliminate problems associated with asbestos dust.
- To cooperate with government agencies in developing and implementing standards for worker protection from asbestos dust, and for the control of asbestos emissions into community air and water.
- To exchange information on asbestos dust control methodology.
- To assist members in the solution of asbestos-health related problems.
- To increase public knowledge of the benefits to be derived from and the importance of asbestos-containing products.

Association Activities

Government Relations. In 1973, the AIA/NA office was moved from New York City to Washington, D.C., to facilitate liaison with the federal government. The Association routinely reports on activities of congressional committees concerned with activities relating to the asbestos industry and provides a continual working relationship with such government agencies as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Mine Safety and Health Administration, Bureau of Mines, and Department of Transportation. The Association appears before these groups, provides written comment where appropriate, makes available specialists from its members to serve on government advisory committees, and participates in the rulemaking process for standards affecting the industry. AIA/NA's government relations program is also actively involved with state and local programs for asbestos regulation.

Medical Affairs. Besides serving as a central agency for the collection and dissemination of medical information on asbestos-related disease, AIA/NA is represented at major medical meetings of interest to its members and has sponsored medical research on asbestos and health. The Association has the services of a medical scientist to advise on the asbestos-health issues as recognized in the scientific community.

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Publications. Preparation and distribution of informational materials is an important function of the Association. Among the widely circulated materials is an employee pamphlet describing the health problems that can result from excessive exposure to asbestos dust and the measures that can be taken to safeguard the health of asbestos workers. Other materials include a comprehensive handbook of federal regulations on asbestos, booklets on workplace practices, posters for employee information and guidance, and pamphlets on other asbestos-related subjects. The Association publishes a monthly newsletter to inform its members and affiliated organizations of current interest matters. Medical and technical papers are available from the Association's library.

Environmental Control. Through its Technical Committee of experts in the fields of industry hygiene, occupational safety and health and plant engineering, AIA/NA follows and evaluates new developments in dust control methodology and monitoring techniques. The Association makes available its findings through various publications.

Public Relations. To respond to public interest in the asbestos-health issue, the Association answers queries of news media, private groups and individuals; assists writer research and, in short, takes all reasonable steps to present to the public responsible information on asbestos and the asbestos-health issue.

Employee Relations. The Association makes available informational materials to assist its members in presenting to employees a realistic picture of potential health problems associated with the processing of asbestos and the procedures required to minimize hazards to health in the workplace.

Legal Affairs. AIA/NA seeks to provide its members with information on responsibilities and obligations under the various laws and regulations that affect the use of asbestos.

Customer Relations. Because of the widespread and often misleading publicity which asbestos has received in recent years, efforts are made by the Association to provide its members with factual information to overcome the apprehensions that have arisen in some customer relationships.

Industry Studies. To advise governmental regulatory agencies in the development of reasonable standards for exposure to asbestos dust, AIA/NA has sponsored independent studies to ascertain technological feasibility and economic impact of proposed regulations.

Inter-Industry Relations. AIA/NA maintains a close working relationship with various groups associated with the industry, such as the Asbestos Cement Pipe Producers Association, Resilient Floor Covering Institute, Roof Coatings Manufacturers Association, and Friction Materials Standards Institute. The Association contributes its expertise to the American Society for Testing and Materials, American National Standards Institute, American Industrial Hygiene Association, and other technical organizations.

Industry-Government Conference. In 1974, following its annual meeting, the Association conducted its first annual Industry-Government Conference. The success of this meeting through exchange of information and discussion by industry leaders, governmental officials, representatives of organized labor and spokesmen from the scientific community has lead to the conduct of the conference on an annual basis.

International Relations. The health problems which have been associated with asbestos are not, of course, unique to North America. Indeed, a great deal of the medical literature on asbestos and health and dust control technology comes from outside the United States.

Since its founding, AIA/NA has been closely associated with Canadian asbestos organizations, the Asbestosis Research Council and Asbestos Information Centre (United Kingdom), the Association Francaise de l'Amiante (France), and other international asbestos interest groups. In July 1975, AIA/NA became a charter member of the Asbestos International Association, a world-wide organization of national associations with the purpose of providing timely exchange of information on matters concerning occupational and environmental health in the asbestos industry and facilitation of endeavors to eliminate possible risks to health arising from the use of asbestos