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Mr. A.C. Mann

NM/IHW

14th August 1967

Mr. J. Waddell,
T.B.A Co. Ltd.,
Rochdale.

cc: JPMcC/JCB/RHW



Asbestos and Health
I.C.I Limited

Mr. Pennington and I had an interview with Mr. A. W. Elmes, Head of Research on the Non-Metallic Materials side, and his assistant, Mr. Hall, with the following results.

(1) S.L.A.

Mr. Elmes corrected me at the outset when I referred to there being an embargo on the use of S.L.A. for insulation purposes, and expressed the hope that this would not extend to fire protection and structural usages. He said there was no embargo whatsoever, but that they would not use asbestos when they could find a satisfactory non-asbestos substitute. By the end of our discussions, Mr. Elmes had, in fact, admitted that while there was an embargo de jure, there was, in reality, an embargo de facto arising from his insistence that the criteria for the use of S.L.A must be the unavailability of any substitute. Clearly, this implied an extremely limited number of applications for which there would, in I.C.I's books, be any scope for the continued use of S.L.A., such application being, in fact, confined to situations where a completely inorganic insulant was essential. Mr. Elmes justified this strict approach by saying that they were determined not to use a material which could lead to a maintenance problem at a future date, and he stressed repeatedly that, from the point of view of chemical plant and structure, achievement of optimum efficiency or minimum cost in relation to an item like insulation for fire protection which represented a very small element of the total project, was much less important to them than getting

the plant into operation on time and minimising down time for maintenance purposes during its life. They were convinced that the complications which would be involved in satisfying the health regulations relative to the use of S.L.A. were unacceptable in this connection. Mr. Elmes was not even prepared to admit that it was likely there would be many instances in which it would be worth doing a cost exercise to determine whether, in fact, the additional complications involved by the health regulations were outweighed by the economic or technical advantages of the product and he adhered to his principle that only when there were no alternatives on technical grounds could we expect S.L.A. to be employed.

I suggested to him that, for the present, we were talking in something of a vacuum, pending the finalisation of the Ministry regulations, but that when they were finalised, we would hope to have the opportunity of demonstrating that the implementation of the Regulations did not, in fact, involve the liability to delays and hold-ups to other trades, etc. which Mr. Elmes foresaw. This is an approach we must pursue and which might, in the long run, enable us to retain a little business but, even so, I have the impression that it will be difficult to persuade I.C.I. to change their mind.

One factor at the back of all this is undoubtedly the keen interest of Elmes and his Assistant in our mineral wool developments, and I have no doubt that they are making the going as tough as possible for us on S.L.A. with a view to encouraging the more rapid development of the newer materials. They seemed particularly pleased with the results so far achieved on the trial applications of the new asbestos-free BD.C. Mr. Elmes promised that there would be plenty of work in I.C.I. for a good sprayed mineral wool product as soon as we could make it available. He further said they would be very glad to co-operate with us in providing trial facilities on a confidential basis whenever we felt the time appropriate.

(2) Asbestos Boards

Elmes said he saw no reason why the use of asbestos boards for encasing steelwork should be prohibited and assured us that, here, there was absolutely no embargo. I then suggested that in the psychological climate of the moment, it was likely that plant engineers might tend, nevertheless, to play safe, and that it would be desirable for us to know to what higher authority an appeal could be made in the event of a plant engineer turning down the use of asbestos boards on health grounds. He said that in such cases, there was no substitution for hammering the engineer himself of his immediate superiors in the plant or operating division concerned. He agreed that there could be a problem in this connection, but felt it was one which could not be tackled centrally. What emerged, therefore, is that sales representatives handling insulation board, a-c products and the like, should understand clearly that there is, in fact, no embargo on their use by I.C.I. and should be prepared to argue the matter at the highest level in the particular plant or division involved. Elmes did not feel that there should be much difficulty in this area.

My conclusions from this meeting are that as regards S.L.A., the outlook is very dim indeed and that while we should not abandon the hope of getting occasional business, we should accept the fact that I.C.I. have got their dyes firmly fixed on our mineral wool propositions and that we should, therefore, press on with them as quickly as possible. As regards asbestos boards, these are unlikely to be at any immediate disadvantage.

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Mr. A. C. [unclear]

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