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By BILL GARDINER

23 AUG 1981

SOUTH African stevedores, especially those in Port Elizabeth, are serious risking their health by handling shipments of asbestos.

Despite containerisation, at least 30% of asbestos exports are still shipped i pressure-packed bags which are known to puncture and tear, shedding fine — ye highly dangerous — asbestos fibres over dockworkers.

The regional director of the Department of Health in Port Elizabeth, Dr J D Krynauw, — where most asbestos is handled — has ordered an investigation.

"Since this has been brought to our notice, we will certainly look into the matter because this is a health hazard — there is no doubt about that," he said.

A month-long investigation by a newspaper, the Weekend Post, has revealed that asbestos fibres from torn and punctured bags have choked the air in ships' holds.

Stevedores who were interviewed said bags holding asbestos had split while handled in the holds, particularly when workers, unaware of the health hazard, used hooks to move the bags.

On certain occasions, loose bags and strapped bags containing asbestos, would fall into the holds during loading, throwing up asbestos dust and fibres into the air.

They said the stevedore "bosses" did not pro- protective clothing or masks nor a change of overalls.

According to medical research into occupation- al diseases, asbestos fibres — some not even visible to the naked eye — could be carried on the workers' overalls or their skin and, as a result, their families would also be exposed to the risk of getting asbestos-related diseases.

Some of the most dangerous fibres are too small to see and can cause a scarring of the lungs — asbestosis — and various forms of lung cancer.

The Port Elizabeth Stevedoring Labour Supply Company, which recruits dock workers, has re- fused to discuss the controversial issue of asbes- tos shipments through the harbour and the serious health hazard facing the stevedores working with inadequately packaged asbestos.

"It is no concern of mine," the manager, Mr C J Wilson, said.

"I supply the labour and the (stevedoring) companies work the ships.

"I wouldn't know if the bags an or cannot tear. I don't ndle cargo, I handle ople."

ed if the company sup- protective clothing and asks to its workers when ey were handling asbestos, said the company only sup- ed overalls, boots and hel- The provision of gloves, and goggles was the ponsibility of the stevedor- companies, which requisi- ed labour from the Port zabeth Stevedoring Labour ply Company.

e referred further enquir- to Mr H de Witte, manager e South African Steve- Service Company (Ltd) (SASCO).

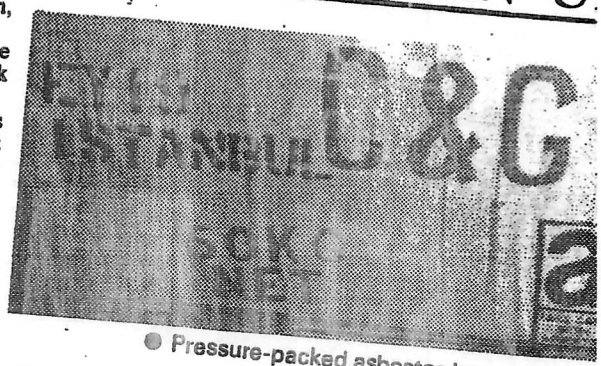
Mr De Witte refused to dis- cuss the matter.

He said Mr Wilson had con- tacted him about the subject and he had no further comment.

"Mr Wilson told you about it. He mentioned it to me. I have no further comment to make and I am going to the telephone down now."

Approached for comm the General Workers' U (GWU) — which repres the stevedores — said it aware of the "acute he hazard" from asbestos and matter had already be raised with stevedo

THE AIR IN SHIPS HOLDS IS CHOKED WITH AN U



● Pressure-packed asbestos bags with a h

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seniors, rejecting manage- ment offers of 18 percent plus seven percent on merit.

The SASJ officially declared a dispute two weeks ago, and seven newspapers subse- quently decided to work to rule, doing no more work than their contractual obligations dictated.

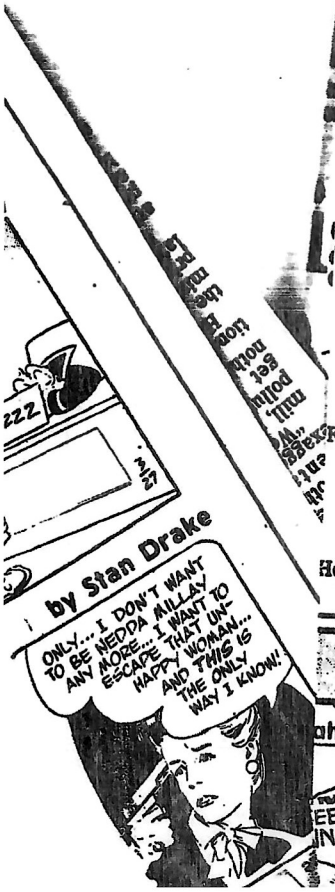
Suspended

However, with the re-opening of negotiations journalists at the Daily News in Durban yester- day suspended their work to rule action while the outcome of the talks was awaited.

SASJ president Mr John Allen said last night the journalists had decided to avoid seeking the appointment of a conciliation board, if possible, be- cause of the "external pres- sures, including those from the Government, already fac- ing the industry".

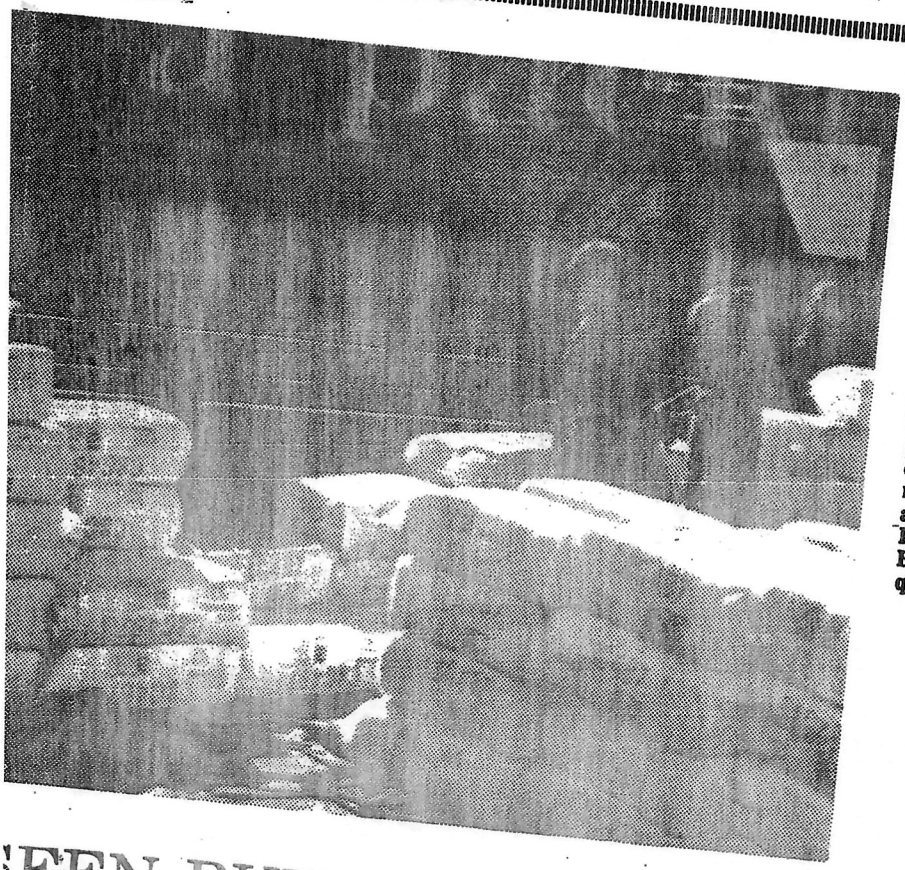
Five SASJ representatives and four managers had met for 1½ hours yesterday without arriving at a firm conclusion, and talks would continue to- day, he said.

He described the negotiations as "examining options". — Sapa.



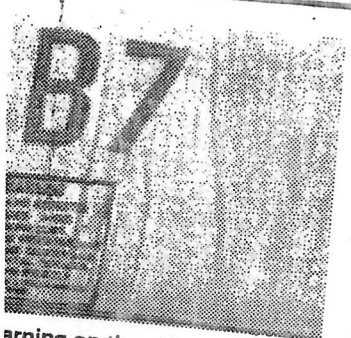
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NDAY EXPRESS



● Stevedores without protective clothing move asbestos on a Port Elizabeth quay

EEN BUT DEADLY MENACE



arning on the side.

management.

"The work processes are being investigated and they will be improved," a GWU spokesman said.

"Workers are to be medically examined by doctors and, once the tests have been completed, the question of workers' compensation for asbestos-related diseases will be raised."

Some of the more remote ports had not yet containerised so the asbestos was shipped in pressure-packed bags.

"All of it used to be supplied in bags at one time, but because of containerisation and the health hazard this is not the case now."

The regional director of the Department of Health in Port Elizabeth, Dr J D Krynauw, said although he had not received any formal complaints about the loading of asbestos at the harbour, he would instruct his staff to look into the matter.

Accidents and isolated incidents of the loading of material which was a danger to health could occur at times, but if it was a regular mishandling of such material "then we will certainly look into it".

"If it is a common occurrence, the health of the community in that area would be in danger."

Political comment in this issue by R A Gibson, headlines and sub-editing by Barry Baxter, design by Les Stephenson, all of 171 Main Street, Johannesburg.