FILE NAME: Asbestos Sacks and Bags (ASB)

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GJ

Similar letter to : H. C. Armstrong, Comm.Councillor, Metals & Minerals
Office of the High Commissioner for Canada,
1, Grosvenor Square, W.1.

M. J. Brazier, G. A. Brazier & Co. Ltd.,
Newly House, 309, Chase Road, N.14.
Universal Asbestos Manufacturing Co. Ltd.,
Tolpits, Watford, Herts.

5th Floor. 10.30 a.m.
25th August. 65.
Graham
Lindsell.

Mr. James,
Johns Manville & Co. Ltd.,
20, Albert Embankment,
London, S.E.1.

15B 9th August, 1965.

Dear Sir,

ASBESTOS IN BAGS

Following our telephone conversation, I should first explain that the Ocean Shipowners Group Joint Committee is the joint industrial body responsible for working conditions within the Ocean Trades of the Port of London.

At the present time, both sides are concerned over the possible risk of men sustaining Asbestosis. Whilst for some years this fear has existed, it has been brought to a head in the Port of London recently, following gangs employed on a particular vessel obtaining a medical opinion for themselves from Dr. Donald Hunter of the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, and a copy of the letter written by the latter is enclosed.

Since the gangs concerned obtained this advice, the discharge of Asbestos on the vessel has been restricted to approximately one ton per hour, the men being supplied with Siebe Gorman Masks Mark IV.

Whilst that vessel has now been completed, the issue has spread to other vessels subsequently discharged in the Port, as both Trade Unions representing Port Transport Workers have issued their Members certain instructions. These are set out in a circular which I, as Secretary of the Shipowners Organisation, sent to my constituents on 30th July, copy attached.

As when the discharge of the bags of Asbestos is completed, a certain amount of dust will remain, it is understood Dr. Hunter has advised the men to continue wearing the masks and continue the discharge of the other commodities at a reduced output.

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You will appreciate that this will have a grave affect on the importing of Asbestos through the Port of London.

Following a decision of the Joint Committee, a Consultant Bio-Chemist is at the present time examining the dust count in the atmosphere of ships' holds during the course of discharge of the various types of bags which are imported. It is, of course, reasonable to expect that one of the features of his Report will be concerned with a recommendation as to the best type of bag to be used. The question still remains, however, as to whether - whatever is contained in the Report - the men will accept the conclusions reached, in face of the opinion held by Dr. Hunter. Indeed, it may be necessary to submit our Bio-Chemists Report to a Doctor for further comment.

Insofar as the Docks are concerned, it is felt by some Members of my Committee that the risk of Asbestosis is far greater in the processing industry than to dockers, who are only in contact with this commodity in small quantities for short durations at infrequent intervals. It has, therefore, occurred to me that the producers or processors of Asbestos Fibre may have available to them considerable medical information on the risk of Asbestosis, even though it may be limited to the circumstances under which their employees work.

At the same time, it is felt that you might be able to provide me with some useful information on your experience and possibly comment on the risks dockers might run, together with any other useful information which you think may be of assistance to me. It might even be useful to know to what extent employees concerned with mining and processing might have suffered, if such information can be made available.

Whilst the issue at present is restricted to the handling of the raw Asbestos, it has been indicated by one Trade Union that an approved mask should be worn even when handling the manufactured product, such as sheets, pipes, etc. Whilst I personally feel that this view has been taken in the present climate of grave fear over the raw material, and thus may not become a problem, it will be useful if you could also comment on this aspect.

Since the Trade Unions made known their policy to their Members, the reaction has varied in the dock, and whilst where Members of the Transport & General Workers Union

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are solely concerned the discharge has continued not unreasonable, the reaction of the Stevedores to their union's instruction has been to work the commodity at time rate and not piecework, but unfortunately in working to time rate their output has been severely restricted. Furthermore, with this particular category of labour the issue still remains, after the Asbestos is completely discharged, since under the instructions of their Trade Union, following the advice their Members received from Dr. Hunter, they have to continue wearing the masks on other cargo, and as a result, output of those commodities is also seriously restricted.

In conclusion I must once again reiterate my request for any observation or information which you might consider of use to us, in our endeavour to overcome this issue.

Yours faithfully,

(D. L. Bennett)
Secretary