FILE NAME: Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR)

DATE: 1974 June 18

DOC#: CSR057

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Memo - Notes RE Asbestos Hazard - CSR Experience at Wittenoom and Elsewhere

(MGK)

18th June, 1974

NOTES RE ASBESTOS HEALTH HAZARD

CSR Experience at Wittenoom and elsewhere

CSR began using asbestos as a raw material for asbestos cement in the early 1940's.

CSR mined white asbestos (chrysotile) in Tasmania in small quantities in the early 1940's, and became interested in blue asbestos (crocidolite) in about 1944.

From discussions with Johns-Manville in Canada, and later with Cape Asbestos (blue) in South Africa we were always aware of some danger from inhalation of asbestos dust or fibre. Initially we understood this to be similar to silicosis but later heard of asbestosis and other related diseases.

Our attitude was that any industrial dust was potentially harmful and should be avoided or prevented. We provided increasingly elaborate and more effective means of dust collection at our factories and at the Australian Blue Asbestos mill in particular.

CSR, the W.A. Mines Department and Health Department, and other asbestos users in Australia were all largely guided by overseas experience where asbestos fibre had been produced and used industrially for over 100 years - and still is. More has been learned about asbestos and its hazards, as with many other products in common use. Much more elaborate precautions are taken nowadays (in some cases specified by law) to minimise human exposure to asbestos dust, but this is paralleled by similar precautions in all other industries.

All kinds of protective devices are seen as necessary now in industry generally which were not regarded as important 20 years ago. The use of hard hats, safety glasses, face masks, etc., are simple examples.

Radiation hazards have not stopped development of nuclear fuels and power stations - but proper precautions are taken.

I do not accept that it can be agreed that CSR acted irresponsibly or treated lightly its responsibilities in regard to the asbestos dust hazard at Wittenoom or elsewhere in our manufacturing operations. We acted in accordance with the then current state of knowledge and adopted good industrial practice

The production of blue asbestos and amosite in South Africa is continuing and these fibres are in common industrial use world wide. The same applies to white asbestos. These materials can be safely used if proper procedures are followed.

M.G.K.,

18/6/74

c.c. Mr. A.C. Browne
Mr. A.V. Shaw
Mr. A.J. Campbell
Mr. J.H. Matthews

This was written from my general recollection of the matters, & prior to seeing Dr Smyther's note of 18/6. However it seems to accord well with Dr B.M.S. note.