

THE ASBESTOS INFORMATION COMMITTEE

10 WARDOUR STREET, LONDON, W.1

REGent 7617

ASBESTOS INFORMATION COMMITTEE

Summary of first year's work
to 30th April 1968

*Asbestos
Research
Council*

1. Formation of Asbestos Information Committee

The Asbestos Information Committee was formed in April 1967. Its members are Turner & Newall Ltd., Cape Asbestos Co. Ltd., B.S.A. Group Ltd. and Central Asbestos Co. Ltd. It retains Hill & Knowlton International as its public relations consultants and operates officially from the Hill & Knowlton offices in 10 Wardour Street, London, W.1.

2. Structure

The detail of A.I.C. work is planned by the following sub-committees:

Press Relations and Advertising
Literature
Liaison with Asbestos Fibre
Importers Committee
Architecture and Building
Parliamentary
Conference
Films

3. Press Relations

The first of a series of constructive measures taken by the Asbestos Information Committee was a press conference on 19th May 1967 at which the industry's concern over health and its past record were fully explained. At the same time it was announced that the use of blue fibre was being voluntarily restricted, that fibre was being imported in dust-proof packs (and blue palletised), that £100,000 was earmarked for the Asbestos Research Council over the next 5 years, that Codes of Practice for additional user industries were being prepared and that four asbestos companies had set up the Asbestos Information Committee to keep the public properly informed on matters concerning asbestos and health. For the first time, as a result, press coverage presented the asbestos industry in a favourable light.

The Committee sponsored a supplement in The Times on Asbestos on 23rd November 1967, which covered the positive benefits conferred on industry and the public by the use of asbestos-based products, and included an

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impartial article on the health question by The Times' medical correspondent.

Misleading articles in medical, technical and local journals have been challenged by letters to editors. The Committee sponsored a useful special number in the magazine "Insulation" on the subject of asbestos, prepared an article for publication by the Asbestos Fibre Importers' Committee in the P.L.A. newspaper "The Port" and an article in the Safety Officers' journal "Protection". The Committee have appointed a retained medical journalist for a probationary period of three months.

4. Television

Leaders of the industry and its medical advisers have been given professional instruction in case it proves necessary for an industry spokesman to appear on a television programme.

5. Members of Parliament

The Committee met eighteen Members of Parliament at the House of Commons on 30th January 1958. A copy of the memorandum produced at the time for M.P.s is attached. The A.I.C. panel explained the asbestos industry's achievements and policy on asbestos and health and answered questions. The panel received a favourable reception and were impressed by the responsible and informed approach of the M.P.s who attended. Several M.P.s have visited the factories of member companies and been shown the industry's practical safety measures.

6. Civil Service

It appears that two interdepartmental meetings have now taken place on asbestos and health, the Ministries represented being Labour, Health, Housing and Local Government and Board of Trade. We have hearsay evidence that the civil servants present expressed balanced views, though we still understand that the Factory Inspectorate are proposing to circulate a list of substitutes for asbestos. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government circulated various bodies and companies in the asbestos industry on 5th January regarding the Disposal of Asbestos Waste. Representatives of the A.I.C., A.R.C. and the Asbestos Association will in due course be invited to a meeting at the Ministry to discuss the contents of a questionnaire and the sample of the industry to whom it should be sent. The Department of Education and Science were persuaded to write to local authority architects who appear to have misunderstood the intent of a D.E.S. circular on asbestos and health as calling for substitutes for asbestos for building applications.

7. T.U.C.

A paper on the past, present and future usage of blue fibre was prepared for the T.U.C. The A.I.C. will be making personal contact with various interested Union officials during 1968.

8. Universities

A misleading memorandum circulated by Leeds University to the Building Officers of Universities was challenged by the Committee, which succeeded in securing the circularisation of the original addressess with the industry's rebuttal of the memorandum.

9. British Standards Institution

The Committee have asked representatives of member companies who sit on Committees of the British Standards Institution to resist the incorporation in British Standards of prominent warnings on the dangers of inhaling asbestos dust.

10. World Health Organisation

Dr. Holmes, Secretary of the A.R.C., visited Copenhagen at the beginning of January and met Dr. Aage Grut, Director of the Danish Department of Occupational Health, and Mr. Homann Pedersen of the Elsinore Shipyard, who had circulated a memorandum damaging to asbestos to the Association of Danish Shipbuilders. Mr. Pedersen has subsequently circulated an addendum to his original report, recommending (a) alternatives to asbestos, where possible, for insulation, and (b) a framing system for asbestos-based bulkheads which eliminates the necessity for screwing and drilling.

The A.I.C. have written to the Board of Trade drawing their attention to the damage which may be caused to the British asbestos industry's exports by irresponsible statements from officials of the World Health Organisation.

11. Customers

The Committee has attempted by personal approaches to encourage various large users of asbestos materials to concentrate on effective control measures rather than the substitution of alternative materials to asbestos. It hoped to arrange a conference of international standing of key health policy makers in larger organisations in February 1969.

12. Advertising

Because of a growing belief that it is unsafe to occupy buildings in the structure of which asbestos-based materials have been employed, reassuring advertisements were inserted in architectural, building, hospital and educational journals, and in the journal "Protection" in the form of a Statement by the Asbestos Industry. Copies are attached. A positive advertising campaign on the indispensability of asbestos in selected national media is at present being considered.

13. Literature

The Committee published a pamphlet in May 1967 entitled "Asbestos and your Health" for issue to dockers at ports faced with labour troubles over the handling of asbestos cargoes. Good use has been made of this pamphlet.

It has subsequently published a booklet, principally intended as a source book for companies' own booklets on the health problem, and for the guidance of representatives, entitled "Asbestos - Safety and Control", and a confidential leaflet for guidance of the industry's sales representatives entitled "Putting the Case for Asbestos". Copies of all three publications are attached.

At the same time the Asbestosis Research Council has in addition to the existing Code of Practice on Thermal Insulation, produced new Codes of Practice covering the Building and Shipbuilding Industries, is drafting a new Code on the Disposal of Asbestos Waste and cooperated in the drafting of a new Code on the Handling of Asbestos in the Docks.

14. Films

Assistance was given to the Central Office of Information with a film on asbestos for overseas showing. A proposed treatment for a 20-25 minute 16 mm colour film on asbestos and its uses is at present being considered by the Committee.

15. Speakers Panel

The A.I.C. is building up a panel of speakers on asbestos who will be given proper training and briefing on health matters. A presentation was successfully given to an audience of Yorkshire plant engineers in Leeds by an A.I.C. panel on 13th March.

16. Publicity Officers' Conference

A briefing and discussion conference for the publicity officers of member companies and their subsidiaries was held in September 1967, to which some of the constructive ideas since adopted by the A.I.C. can be attributed.

17. Enquiry Service

The Hill & Knowlton offices have dealt with 275 telephoned and 394 written enquiries on asbestos.

18. Liaison with other bodies

The A.I.C. has maintained close liaison with the Asbestosis Research Council and the Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee.

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15.5.1968