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A. Dalton Asbestos: Killer Dust

BSSRS Publ. Ltd. UK (1979)

for almost all their

December 1976 (in an
and alternative ma-
quite likely that many
stos can continue to be
to health.'

Engineer April 1977,
material', wrote: 'Over
has been considerable
aspects of using asbes-
operating asbestos. Much
rmed, often of a con-
given rise to anxiety,
blic, who are often the
ome or in their vehicles.'

77, 'Do we still need
research can be safely
panies, who are working
ements...the economic
os is a strong one.'

d Design June 1977,
isal': 'The position has
sed...fears have largely
l news features.'

away from the 'profes-
get even worse. Thus
were treated to a re-
zards of asbestos in an
Smither - Cape's own

its search for profit the
e a good job of cover-
e health hazards of its
ctions of a responsible

lines

on asbestos, Dr R.S.J.
Department of Mines,
atingly high' levels of
es. By August 1977 he
itions in the asbestos
are under effective

Conditions in asbestos
mines in 1949 were de-
scribed by a US doctor,
G.W.H. Schepers⁵

During 1949 I made the
first official governmental
radiological and clinical
survey of the asbestos
industry in the North East-
ern Transvaal. At that time,
industrial hygiene in one of
these mines and asbestos
works was simply deplorable.
Exposures were crude and
unchecked. I found young
children, completely in-
cluded within large shipping
bags, trampling down
fluffy Amosite asbestos,
which all day came cascad-
ing over a hefty whip. I
believe these children to
have the ultimate dust
exposure. X-rays revealed
several to have radiological
asbestosis with Corpulmonale
(failure of the right side of
the heart) before the age of
12. Why Dr Sluis-Cremer
did not see them 10 years
later is fairly evident. There
was probably not one of
them still alive...

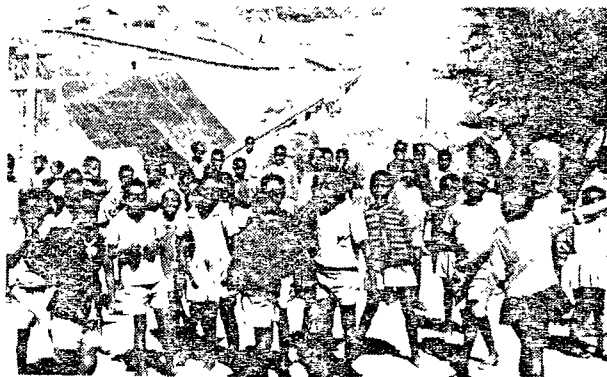
To gain a true perspective
he should have seen those
mines in 1949. In the
valley where the mill was
located asbestos dust rolled
through like the morning
mist, and I had a hard time
keeping my staff in working
trim because of itching skins
caused by asbestos adhering
to our clothes. Even the food
at the local hotel was gritty
with dust.

control'.⁶ But figures he released of dust analysis
done by his department as late as 1976 showed
that the dust level in the mines varied from 1 to
9 fibres per ml (over 4 times the safe level
allowed in the UK - see p.119). As the Annual
Report of the South African Government
Department of Mines for 1973 commented:
'Current concentrations (of asbestos dust in the
air) still represent a health hazard and further
improvements must be brought about'. In 1975
Rodney Cowton, a journalist with *The Times*,
approached the two major British asbestos
companies with mines in South Africa - Turner
and Newall and Cape Industries - asking what
they were doing. Both companies claimed it was
their policy to bring their operations throughout
the world to British standards. 'Both claimed to
be making some progress in this direction but
neither would give a target date for the fulfil-
ment of that policy,' he reported.⁷ Meanwhile
blue asbestos, under a voluntary ban by the
asbestos industry in the UK because of its
dangerous nature, is being mined more than ever
by Cape's in South Africa. One law for the white
and another for the black?

5 *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol 132,
1965, p.246.

6 Letter to BSSRS, August 1977.

7 *The Times*, 20 January 1975.



Playing next to an African asbestos mine.