FILE NAME: !ăōŜăűƨă {l·Ǒ⅂ă l·yŘ . l·∃ă (!{ .ú

DATE: мфссπмфст

DOC#: !{ .лпл

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: tƨ₪ű ƨ₮ [ƨyŘƨy′ !dzűKƨ₪ƛűè hǑǑdzLJl·űƛƨyl·f lŜl·fűK /ƛ₪Ǒdzfl·₪ ɘ lƨdzăŜ ƨ₮ /ƨY′Y′ƨyã wŜLJƨ₪ű π !ăōŜăűƨăπ/l·yǑŜ₪ wƛă⅂ă

158 MORRIS (34)

Occupational Health
Circular No. M.1/966

ASBESTOS

Inquiries by staff employed in the Docks indicate concern over effects which, it is suggested, might result from contact with asbestos or the dust coming from cargoes of this commodity. Reports in the National and local Press which have been studied in this Department appear to have confused and exaggerated the risks which could be involved and the following notes are therefore circulated to clarify the situation.

Asbestosis

This is an occupational disease which occurs only in processes of mining and manufacture and a prolonged and continuous exposure of the worker over a number of years is needed before any development can occur. No cases of this serious complaint have ever occurred in the Port of London Authority's service and scientific investigations arranged by the Ministry of Labour in the Docks exclude it as a risk to Dock Labour.

Mesothelioma

This disease has been recently publicised and its development requires similar circumstances to those in which asbestosis is caused. The effects occur only where crude asbestos is processed and a particular variety and grade of dust, not found in commercial cargo, is released into the air. Reports of fatal cases of Mesothelioma occurring in the industrial population are found on examination to relate to communities other than the Docks and invariably having an association with special production processes.

The commodity, as found in ships' cargo, involves no occupational risk of Mesothelioma for the gangs and I have the assurance of H.M. Medical Inspectorate confirming the safety of cargo handling in this connection, as well as in regard to the disease asbestosis.

In deference to complaints regarding certain objectionable consignments of asbestos received the Authority have approved a particular pattern of Industrial Respirator for optional use and they are at the same time pressing for a better system of packaging.

As in the case of other materials causing nuisance to staff instructions have been issued through Dock Managements for control of handling.

Principal Medical Officer

Medical Department,
Port of London Authority,
27th September, 1966.

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
Monday, 17th April, 1967

Asbestos (Cancer Risks)

Mrs. Joyce Butler asked the Minister of Labour if he is aware of the danger to dockers from the risks of cancer from handling asbestos; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gunter: I understand that asbestos may be associated with two kinds of cancer. The first is lung cancer. This occurs more often among people who have asbestosis than it does among the general population. Asbestosis is a lung disease which is contracted through working daily over a period of months or years in fairly heavy concentrations of asbestos dust. I am informed that there is no recorded case of a docker contracting asbestosis from his work, and dockers are therefore no more likely to get lung cancer than anybody else.

It appears that asbestos is also associated with another kind of cancer called mesothelioma. This affects the covering rather than the substance of the lung. It may also affect the lining of the abdominal cavity. It is a very rare disease. Even now with all the publicity that has been given to the subject in the Medical and National Press, reports of new cases are still only coming in at the rate of less than 50 a year.

Of the new cases being reported each year, a substantial majority are thought to have had some occupational exposure to asbestos.

Three main kinds of asbestos are imported into this country. About three-quarters of it is chrysotile or white asbestos; about one-fifth is amosite or brown asbestos, and about one-twentieth is crocidolite or blue asbestos. Current evidence points to blue asbestos as being the variety most commonly associated with mesothelioma. It is impossible to be certain that the others are harmless, but the risks are certainly much less than with blue asbestos.

The chance that any individual docker will get mesothelioma is remote. This is true even with the precautions that have been taken in the past. My Department is revising the Docks Regulations to require additional precautions. In the meantime we have recommended to the producers, importers and users that asbestos of any kind should only be imported into and transported within this country if it is in dust- and fibre-proof containers. Unlined hessian sacks allow too much dust to escape. Multi-wall paper sacks may split under load. Like certain other kinds of packaging such as some kinds of polythene bag they may tear easily and so are not wholly satisfactory. Better results have been obtained by using hessian lined with or bonded to polythene or paper and other promising lines are being investigated.

We must assume that blue asbestos cannot be handled safely even in bags which are normally reasonably dust-proof. Satisfactory conditions can however be obtained if the blue asbestos is packed in dust-proof containers which are then stacked on pallets which can be handled mechanically. An even better method which in time may well be adopted for asbestos is to use container ships.

Dockers are at present only very slightly at risk of getting mesothelioma from asbestos. No one can guarantee that any process is 100 per cent. safe, but all our present knowledge suggests that if our recommendations are followed dockers should in future be at no greater risk than the rest of the population.

ASBESTOS AND YOUR HEALTH

THIS LEAFLET HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR THE INFORMATION OF DOCK WORKERS.

Is there a health risk in asbestos?

Asbestos, a unique and indispensable mineral, can only be a risk to your health if you inhale substantial amounts of airborne asbestos dust. It is perfectly safe to handle otherwise.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a unique mineral fibre, essential to modern industry. There are three types: Chrysotile (white), Amosite (grey or fawn in colour) and Crocidolite (blue).

What is asbestosis?

Asbestosis is a lung condition caused only by prolonged exposure to asbestos dust. **There is no recorded case of a docker ever contracting asbestosis from his work.**

Mr. Ray Gunter, the Minister of Labour, dealt with this matter on April 17th in reply to a Parliamentary question by Mrs. Joyce Butler, Labour MP for Wood Green. The full text of the Minister's statement will be found on page 4.

Does asbestos cause cancer?

Cancer associated with asbestos is extremely rare. In 50 years there have been only about 200 cases of lung cancer associated with asbestos in Great Britain. This compares with the present level of 26,000 cases a year of lung cancer from all causes. There is no evidence that workers with asbestos are any more liable to lung cancer than the general population, unless they get asbestosis first. Since there is no record of a docker ever getting asbestosis from his work, he is in no more danger from this sort of cancer than anybody else. There have also been only 200 cases of cancer of the lining of the chest, or the lining of the stomach cavity, over the past 50 years. This type of cancer is called mesothelioma.

What causes mesothelioma?

Mesothelioma is a very rare form of cancer, which has only recently been shown by medical research to have in some cases an association with asbestos. Cases are being reported at a rate of under 50 a year—many not linked with asbestos. Since mesothelioma may take as long as 40 years to show itself, most of these cases are of people who contracted the disease before or during the war, when controls were not as efficient as they are now.

Is asbestos safe to handle?

Yes, provided shippers pack it in such a way that dust is not emitted. All asbestos coming into British ports is now packed in multi-skin, dust-proof bags. Moreover, pending clarification of medical opinion, all blue asbestos (which is at present suspected of being a particular cause of mesothelioma) is now imported in dust-proof bags *on pallets*. There is no health risk from asbestos packed in this way.

On April 14th this was confirmed by an independent report prepared by three doctors—the Principal Medical Officer of the Port of London Authority, the Medical Adviser to the Trades Union Congress, and a Consultant Physician to the London Hospital, who carried out a special enquiry into the whole subject. The full text of their report is on page 3.

Suppose some bags are damaged?

A few torn bags are no cause for concern, because they will not release large quantities of airborne dust. If through accident large numbers are damaged, then respirators and overalls may be desirable. They should certainly be used for any clearing-up operations. This will ensure your safety.

Is my family at risk from mesothelioma?

A case often quoted is that of the wife who washed her husband's overalls, referred to in the report of Drs. Newhouse and Thompson (of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine). It was said that the husband, a docker, came home covered with asbestos every evening for three or four years and she brushed him down. This occurred some 30 years ago and was clearly a case of regular exposure over a period of years, in a confined space, to asbestos dust. (Furthermore, there is no real proof that this docker's wife contracted mesothelioma from these circumstances Under present-day conditions, and with the precautions we have described, your overalls should not get dusty enough to be dangerous-but if they are very dusty, don't take them home.

What about the case of the tally clerk?

A tally clerk employed in the docks died of mesothelioma. The Coroner found that this clerk contracted the disease from previous employment in an asbestos factory, *not* from his work in the docks.

Why do we have to import asbestos anyway?

Because it is an absolutely vital raw material. For example it is an essential ingredient, because of its heat-resistance, in brake and clutch linings and gaskets. Safety on the roads depends on asbestos. Because of its fire-resistance asbestos is used in the boards and sheets which line ships' cabins. Safety at sea depends on it. It is also used for heat insulation and fire prevention in buildings where large numbers of people have to congregate. There are thousands of essential products in which asbestos is indispensable. And the jobs of at least 23,000 people are directly involved.

To sum up—

Mr. Ray Gunter in his Parliamentary statement summed up the situation as follows: "Dockers are at present only very slightly at risk of getting mesothelioma from asbestos. No one can guarantee that any process is 100 per cent. safe, but all our present knowledge suggests that if our recommendations are followed dockers should in future be at no greater risk than the rest of the population."

ssued under the authority of the Asbestos Information Committee by Hill and Knowlton International,
10 Wardour Street, London W.1. Telephone: REGent 7617.

Inquiry and Conclusions on the Medical Aspects of Working Cargoes of Asbestos by Dockers of the Port of London

1. We have met and discussed the implications of the above commodity as a source of injury to health. We have taken due count of published medical opinion and of official statements by H.M. Chief Inspector of Factories as well as reports by the Pneumoconiosis Panel and all other relevant information available to us.

2. Our enquiries have found no case of injury to the health of a Dock worker in the Port of London that could have resulted from employment there with asbestos cargoes: and we have no knowledge of any cases of Asbestosis occurring otherwise in the Docks Industry in this country as a result of Dock work.

3. We have examined the methods of packaging used by the shippers, and have visited and inspected the methods of stowage in ships, as well as the procedures followed in the Port of London Authority for handling asbestos cargoes and we are satisfied that with asbestos packaged according to the requirements explained to us, namely in impervious lined bags, the future risk should be negligible and no special protective measures should be needed in the Docks.

In the event of sub-standard packaging being met with among the cargoes received we would recommend that the rate of discharge should be controlled by local agreement; more particularly if bursting of bags occurs. Respiratory protection would then be advisable during clearing-up operations, using approved respirators.

4. We are fully satisfied, so far as the Docks Industry is concerned, that no unacceptable risk at present exists and that provided the currently approved requirements and methods of work are followed, Dockers may proceed with confidence in the handling of asbestos cargoes.

5. We are at the same time of the opinion that there is a need for continuing vigilance by the Port Authorities to ensure the exclusion of developing hazards and for this purpose we recommend the regular inspection of cargoes of asbestos together with proper supervision of the health of Docks staff.

Kenneth Perry, M.A., M.D., F.R.C.P.
Consultant Physician to The London Hospital

Robert Murray, M.B., M.R.C.P., D.P.H., D.I.H.
Medical Adviser to The Trades Union Congress

A. M. Lawrence-Smith, M.B., Ch.B.
Principal Medical Officer Port of London Authority

Special Remarks and Observations

I consider that under paragraph 5 the continuing vigilance of the Port Authorities should include regular environmental monitoring of the unloading operation and appropriate medical examination of dockers with long service including exposure to asbestos cargoes. R.M.