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DL/PM

2nd October, 1958.

The Under Secretary for Mines,
Treasury Building,
PERTH.

Dear Mr. Telfer,

Asbestosis - Mine Workers' Relief Act
(Your Reference 1238/55)

Dr. King has referred your letter to me.

In reply:- The Mine Workers' Relief Act should be amended to cover workers suffering from Asbestosis.

Answers to specific queries are -

(a) This year 254 workers employed in the asbestos industry at Wittenoom had chest x-rays. 5 of these were diagnosed as suffering from Asbestosis.

(b) The effect on the workers as in Silicosis, depends on three main factors.

- (1) Duration of exposure.
- (2) Concentrations of asbestos fibres, especially the larger ones.
- (3) Individual variation in response to exposure.

The time of onset from first exposure is also largely dependent on these factors. Perhaps an "average" time could be quoted as 8 years, but it might be much earlier or much later than this.

The chief effect on the worker is increasing breathlessness. The end result of this varies in a similar way to that of Silicosis; i.e. there are varying degrees of incapacity; from breathlessness on considerable exertion to breathlessness at complete rest. Right heart failure may supervene in advanced cases.

As a generalisation, I should say that Asbestosis is more incapacitating than Silicosis.

The incidence of tuberculosis in association with Asbestosis, is considered by most authorities not to be increased. However, most authorities agree that the incidence of cancer of the lung is higher in patients suffering from Asbestosis. This usually has not been manifest for many years after the onset of Asbestosis and does not appear to apply to asbestos workers overall, but only to those suffering from Asbestosis.

(c) The disability is progressive and can be assessed by x-ray changes together with clinical examination. Special lung function tests may also help in assessment.

The x-ray appearances, though different from those found in Silicosis, do lend themselves to the classification adopted for the latter, i.e. early Asbestosis and advanced Asbestosis.

It is to be borne in mind that there may be a combined Silicosis and Asbestosis hazard and a worker may suffer from both of these conditions.

Yours faithfully,

(D. Letham)
PHYSICIAN
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH.