

# Bulletin

PUBLISHED BY L'ASSOCIATION DES MINES D'AMIANTE DU QUÉBEC APR./MAY/JUNE 1981 VOL. 5 NO. 2

## WORLD SYMPOSIUM ON ASBESTOS TO BE HELD IN MAY 1982

Sponsored by the Government of Canada, the Government  
of Québec and the Commission of the European Communities

A World Symposium on Asbestos is to be held in Montréal on May 25, 26 and 27, 1982.

Organized around the theme: "Asbestos, Health and Society", the Symposium will take place under the auspices of the Government of Canada, the Government of Québec and the Commission of the European Communities who took this initiative jointly, with a view to drawing up as objective and complete an analysis as possible of the asbestos situation within the context of the many controversies revolving around this mineral.

International experts in various disciplines will be called on to discuss the major issues which form the core preoccupation of those who, each in their own right, have an interest in asbestos.

### Objectives

Whether the state of scientific and medical research, technological progress, the health and safety of the workers and the public, product safety, environmental protection or the socio-economic impact, no aspect of the asbestos issue will be ignored at this unprecedented international gathering.

Introducing the latest data, the Symposium is intended as both a forum for the free expression of the differing views currently held on the asbestos

issue and an opportunity for dialogue and the exchange of information among the representatives of government, labour, scientific and medical circles and industry.

The Symposium organizers are hoping that this meeting will yield an exhaustive evaluation of the negative and positive aspects of asbestos, so that the international community will be better equipped to determine, with full knowledge of the facts, the limits and possibilities of reconciling, as regards asbestos, economic and commercial interests with social preoccupations, including the quality of life. In short, the Symposium is an attempt to provide as full and objective an answer as possible for those who are wondering whether society can live with asbestos and, especially, whether it needs do without it.

### Participation

The participants in the Symposium will be representing each of the groups which, in their own sphere of operation, are directly concerned with the asbestos issue: the heads of government regulatory agencies on the environment and on occupational health and safety, the heads of consumer protection organizations, senior public servants in the health, labour and social affairs sectors, international organizations in the fields of science,

health and labour, scientists, doctors and researchers renowned for their work and their knowledge on asbestos, delegations of national and international labour federations and delegates of the mining and manufacturing industry.

### Balanced representation

To ensure adequate and balanced representation of all interest groups and all viewpoints, as well as an appropriate distribution according to the geographical regions of the world, participation in the Symposium will be by invitation. The guest list will be drawn up by the Steering Committee which is itself made up of representatives of the principal sectors in question, namely the governments, the scientific community, the labour movement and the industry.

The Steering Committee estimates that the number of invited guests will have to be limited to approximately 600, given the space available at the site of the Symposium.

The Symposium is, in fact, to be held in the General Assembly hall of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a United Nations agency having its headquarters in Montréal and whose facilities are particularly suited to an international conference of this nature.

# THE SYMPOSIUM: Structure and Organization

Managing, coordinating and supervising the organization of the World Symposium on Asbestos is the responsibility of a Steering Committee, made up of one representative of each of the sponsoring bodies, the Government of Canada, the Government of Québec and the Commission of European Communities, a representative of the labour movement, a delegate of the international asbestos industry and a delegate of the Canadian asbestos mining industry.

The representatives of the three sponsoring bodies are co-chairing the Steering Committee and alternately preside at each meeting, where Committee members may be accompanied by observers.

## Organization

The planning, material organization and communications for the conference have been entrusted to the Institut de Recherche et de Développement sur l'Amiante (IRDA) whose Director is acting as Secretary General for the Symposium. In this capacity, he sits on the Steering Committee, the

Program Committee and the Budget Committee.

Finally, the Steering Committee has assigned the Program Committee, whose members it appointed, the task of planning the entire program for the Symposium, of defining the themes and topics for discussion and suggesting possible candidates for session chairmen, speakers and panelists.

## The Steering Committee

**Georges Dahmen**, of the Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources du Québec, Co-Chairman;

**Gary Nash**, of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Government of Canada, Co-Chairman;

**Dr. Heinrich Ott**, of General Directorate XII of the Commission of the European Communities, Co-Chairman;

**Jean Gérin-Lajoie**, of the United Steelworkers of America;

**Sir Neville Stack**, of the Asbestos International Association (AIA);

**J.R.M. Hutcheson**, Chairman of the Board of Johns-Manville Canada,

representing the Institut de Médecine du Travail et de l'Environnement and the AMAQ;

**Dr. Jacques Dunnigan**, of the Institut de Recherche et de Développement sur l'Amiante and Secretary General of the Committee.

## The Program Committee

**Dr. Gabriel Plaa**, Professor, Faculté des Études Supérieures of L'Université de Montréal, Chairman;

**Dr. Heinrich Ott**, of General Directorate XII of the Commission of European Communities;

**Mr. Clément Godbout**, of the United Steelworkers of America;

**Dr. David C.F. Muir**, of the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Centre;

**Mr. Dennis Browne**, of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Government of Canada;

**Dr. Richard Gaze**, of the Asbestos International Association;

**Mr. Jean-Charles Méranger**, of National Health and Welfare, Government of Canada;

**Dr. George Wright**, of l'Institut de Médecine du Travail et de l'Environnement;

**Mr. Lionel Piuze**, of l'Association des mines d'amiante du Québec.

## The Secretariat General

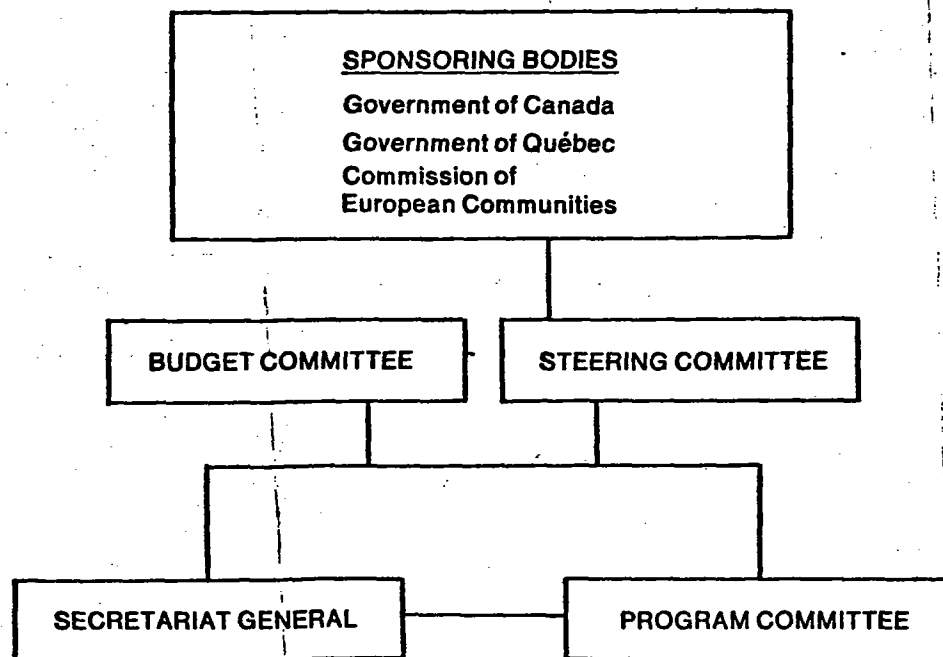
**Dr. Jacques Dunnigan**, of l'Institut de Recherche et de Développement sur l'Amiante, Secretary General;

**Mr. Aleksander Ignatow**, of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Government of Canada;

**Dr. Gilles Lagacé** of the Centre Hospitalier Ste-Marie of Trois-Rivières, representing the Government of Québec;

**Mr. Marcel Valtat**, of l'Association Française de l'Amiante;

**Mr. Yvon Turcot**, of Intercommunica, Communications Consultant.



# THE SYMPOSIUM: Preliminary Program

Although certain details still have to be reviewed and the formulation of certain themes, topics or issues is still subject to change, the program for the World Symposium on Asbestos has, on the whole, been drawn up for the entire three days.

The Symposium has been organized into seven sessions, all of them plenary, with approximately 29 presentations, each scheduled to last 20 to 30 minutes. The Program Committee decided to restrict the length of the presentations in order to allow as much time as possible for the seven panel discussions, which will be open to all participants.

## Asbestos in the Workplace

Day I of the Symposium will principally be devoted to the issue of exposure to asbestos in the workplace and to an evaluation of the risk of this exposure to the workers' health.

The first session, entitled "Asbestos: The Medical Data", will notably include a review of the diseases habitually related to asbestos, a comparison of past and present epidemiological evidence taking into account changes in workplace exposure levels, and a definition of the term "threshold" as applied to carcinogens in general, and to asbestos in particular. Based on the presentations in this session, a panel will discuss the question "Is there a practicable no-effect level for asbestos?"

In the afternoon, a session of a technical order will examine protection methods in the workplace. The presentations will attempt to define the progress made in primary and secondary industry and the problems yet to be solved in this field.

In the course of the third session of the day, three speakers, representing industry, labour and government, will

state their viewpoints on the rights and responsibilities attendant on the use of asbestos in the workplace. A panel made up of the speakers of the second and third sessions will debate the question "Are the workers exposed to excessive risk?"

## The Major Controversies

The fourth session, on the morning of Day II, will consider the full socio-economic impact of the use of asbestos products and asbestos substitutes. Following the presentations, a panel will be invited to debate a particularly thorny question, deliberately phrased in a provocative manner: "Should we replace asbestos?"

In the afternoon, the fifth session will broach another equally crucial aspect, probably the one which has aroused the most emotion in recent years.

This session is devoted to the risks associated with non-occupational exposure, in other words the effects of exposure to asbestos on the health of the general population.

The panel discussion which will follow promises therefore to be particularly lively, all the more so since the question posed, "Is the general population at risk from cancer due to

asbestos exposure?" introduces the notion of a disease which is the "bête noire" of humanity.

## The Future

Day III of the Symposium will attempt to look into the future of asbestos, from the scientific and legislative standpoints.

In the course of session six, the scientific community will take the floor. The speakers will be invited to discuss the current state of research into asbestos, as well as the direction of future research, in light of existing data.

The seventh and final session will deal with regulations and legislation. It will notably include a review of regulations presently in force in various parts of the world and an analysis of the different philosophies underlying the regulatory approaches.

This session will also attempt to define the rationale for regulations on the use of asbestos.

Finally, two questions will be put to a panel of experts from different countries: "To what extent are regulations and legislation in accord with present scientific knowledge?" and "What should be the pattern for future legislation and regulations?"

## The Symposium and the Press

All sessions of the World Symposium on Asbestos will be open to the press.

However, given the limited space which will necessarily restrict attendance at the plenary sessions of the Symposium, the media or journalists wishing to cover this international event will, in due time, be asked to apply in advance for a pass.

To this end, the Secretary will be sending out application forms simultaneously to all news media in the fall.

# Asbestos Chemically Modified During Processing

**Data on the biological effects of asbestos may be inapplicable to finished products**

"When pure, virgin asbestos fibres are incorporated in a mixture with other compounds (cement, organic substances, etc.) and processed into a new final product, the resulting product may very well be one in which the individual ingredients have been modified chemically."

Such are the findings currently subscribed to by several scientists which Dr. Jacques Dunnigan, Director General of l'Institut de Recherche et de Développement sur l'Amiante (IRDA), discussed at the Third Biennial Conference of the AIA, held in London at the end of May.

With the support of laboratory test results of several research teams, including that of Dr. Deruyttere of Belgium, of Dr. Spurny of the Federal Republic of Germany, of a group of scientists at l'Université de Sherbrooke, and of IRDA itself, Dr. Dunnigan demonstrated that all the results lead to believe that the physico-chemical properties of asbestos, in its raw state, undergo substantial alterations when the fibre is incorporated in other material or substances, as is generally the case with asbestos-containing products.

## Results of a French Study on Detection and Prevention

A team of French doctors and scientists recently completed a detailed study of the X-ray files of more than 6 000 asbestos workers and employees, which represents, spread over more than three years, the interpretation of upwards of 35 000 lung and pleural X-ray films of patients exposed to asbestos in an industrial environment.

The results of this mammoth undertaking, which is part of an ongoing epidemiological study, have been compiled into a document which constitutes a veritable treatise on the interpretation of X-rays of workers in the asbestos industry. This publication is available to specialists in industrial medicine, radiologists, lung specialists and other experts.

The publication as well as the study itself were commissioned by l'Association Française de l'Amiante and supervised by Dr. Pierre Zivy, a pneumophthisiologist.

Although exclusively a study in radiological semiology — semiology being that field of medicine which concerns itself with the study of symptoms — it is nonetheless invaluable in that it covers all the asbestos workers in all the asbestos-cement and asbestos textile plants in France.

As the President of l'Association Française de l'Amiante, Cyril Latty, stated in the preface to the new publication: "Thanks to this mammoth study undertaken by Drs. Zivy and Gerber, evidence of the appearance of early pleural symptoms is a clear testament to the timeliness and the value of this paper as regards detection and prevention, which are the focus of industrial medicine."

"The conditions for pathological symptoms," went on Mr. Latty, "which are in many ways still obscure and which have been difficult to identify in view of their latency (20 to 40 years), have thus been more clearly established, through a rational statement rather than frail conjectures. Specialists in industrial medicine are better armed to detect early symptoms of asbestosis and, consequently, to take measures which will prevent the workers under their supervision from increasing the risk to their health".

## Incorrect Extrapolation

Due to this physico-chemical modification, the biological effects associated with pure virgin chrysotile asbestos cannot be automatically associated with the modified fibres contained in finished products: "There are now some fresh scientific data which show that mechanical or chemical manipulations of asbestos result in modifications of biological effects and more specifically in the passivation of these effects."

In light of the available data and of the work in progress in this field, Dr. Dunnigan is of the opinion that regulations concerning the use of finished asbestos-containing products are not scientifically supported, if arrived at by extrapolation of the epidemiological data obtained after exposure to pure, virgin asbestos.

Owing to both the scientific and strategic importance of the new findings in this field, IRDA is planning to establish a laboratory service, having among its principal tasks the evaluation of the physico-chemical and biological properties of the fibrous particles that may be emitted or released from asbestos-containing finished products.

# Michael J. Messel Retires

The man who many knew as "Mr. Asbestos", Michael J. Messel, who devoted more than 43 years of his career to the industry and who, from the start, shaped the development of Lac d'amiante du Québec, where he served as General Manager for over 25 years and as President since 1964, officially retired early this summer. He will however carry on, until the end of 1981, as Chairman of the Board of IRDA and will continue to sit on the Board of Directors of AMAQ.

experience and his intimate knowledge of its evolution.

After recalling the extraordinary growth of mining activity after the second World War, and more specifically in the late sixties and early seventies, a growth characterized by a demand which far exceeded supply, Mr. Messel reviewed the various problems confronting the industry today, particularly in terms of regulation, legislation and adverse publicity, the negative effects of which are complicated by an unfavourable economic climate.

## Surmountable Problems

All this, in the view of the former President of LAQ, in no way means that asbestos is doomed: "There is no such

adopting a more balanced approach to asbestos, Mr. Messel is also convinced that, as time goes by, and with the appearance of new scientific and medical data, other substances may well replace asbestos as a focus for those who have fostered the present climate of hysteria.

This does not mean that the asbestos industry will ever relive the golden era of the last two decades: "Those times are over for good. The profile of the asbestos industry is changing, but so is society and it's not the end of the world."

## Foreseeable Changes

"We have to face the fact," observed Mr. Messel, "that asbestos mining and manufacturing will not provide, in the foreseeable future, the kind of returns it used to. The industry will have to live with that reality and take the necessary steps to cope with it: redirecting production, rationalizing costs and, perhaps, even reducing production capacity to adjust to the demand level and to lower the breakeven point. In the not too distant future, economic imperatives might lead to certain mergers or regrouping of mines."

Marketing of asbestos has also undergone some profound changes, according to Mr. Messel: "Today you have to step up your marketing, practically beat the sidewalks, and it is not sufficient to go to the purchasing agent or department; you need to call on the chief executive officer or chief operating officer to find out about the company's policy on asbestos products. You even have to try and influence the policy makers within the companies."

## Future Prospects

While acknowledging that producing and marketing asbestos does present a challenge today, Mr. Messel nevertheless concluded that, all things considered, and in view of the irreplaceable properties of asbestos in certain applications and the high cost of energy, which will make this mineral increasingly more competitive, "the asbestos marketing picture over the long haul may be brighter than the current situation leads to believe".



Jean Dupéré (at left) and Michael J. Messel.

His successor as President and Chief Executive Officer of LAQ is Jean Dupéré who, at the time of his appointment, held the position of Executive Vice President.

Mr. Messel's retirement was honoured with several social events, during which the world of asbestos, as well as the communities of Thedford Mines and Black Lake and the employees of LAQ, paid him tribute.

## Guest Speaker at the AIA

Mr. Messel himself took the opportunity at the AIA Third Biennial Conference in London, just before retiring, to discuss the state of the asbestos industry as he sees it, in light of his long

thing as an endless downturn or an endless upturn. The swing of the pendulum is universal, and if we manage to hold the fort through the difficult period we are confronted with, I am convinced that, in the long run, asbestos will outlive its attackers."

"At the moment," went on Mr. Messel, "we have the environmental problems and the misinformation to cope with, but the industry shall overcome this, for it possesses the brains, the energy and the advanced technology to do so."

Noting that there has already been a change in the attitude of the scientific community and that recent studies, such as the one conducted by Dr. McDonald's team, have greatly contributed to scientists the world over

RECEIVED

OCT 14 1981

R. J. PARRY

HWBUI0005279