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PROGRAM Today Show

STATION WNBC/TV and NBC television network

DATE April 23, 1970 - 7:00AM

CITY New York

INTERVIEW WITH JEROME KRETCHMER

MODERATOR: In this segment we have two guests, one in New York and one in Washington. First we're going to talk with Jerome Kretchmer, who is newly appointed Environmental Protection Administrator for New York City, and will take office May 1.

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KRETCHMER: Well, here in New York, we're into one right now that is really of great consequence to us. As you may or may not know, there is competent medical evidence which indicates that asbestos particulate matter, when it's sprayed into the air, is harmful to people's health. We spray asbestos on our commercial office buildings when we build them to fireproof the steel and to fire-retard the steel. We are now in the process of promulgating a series of rules - we have promulgated a series of rules - to limit the way in which that asbestos is sprayed. And we're very deep into that. After we promulgated the rules -- and we did this in cooperation with industry. I like to call it the carrot and the stick, you know, let's come in and talk -- and then after we promulgated the rules - industry agreed that they could live with them, the sprayers said that they were reasonable - we went out and looked at the job sites, and they were still spraying in a way which releases the asbestos particulate into the ambient air.

We served two of the worst offenders last week with orders to show why the equipment should not be sealed. Now, if they can't come in and indicate to us that they're going to do this job right, or they're going to do it a different way, then we're going to order them to stop. Now that's tough.

MODERATOR: Through the courts?

KRETCHMER: That's right. Because the economic consequences of that are very different. We stand the risk of closing down a potential industry in New York, the construction industry. But we're convinced if we indicate to them that we really mean business here, that they'll either find different ways to get that stuff on that's not so harmful to health, or to put this stuff on in the way they are but they'll do it and enclose the area in which they're spraying, and - they'll just listen.

The question here is can we use the courts and the law to do what has to be done? This - our ability to close this equipment has been in this law for a long, long time. Nobody's ever taken advantage of it before because it affects things you do. Just think of the overriding consequence of a person like me who comes into a job like this and in the first couple of days he's been in he says, Ok, now you've got to stop spraying asbestos.

Well, I think that that's what this is all about. I think somebody has to say to these people, stop spraying the asbestos. And then somebody has to have the initiative and the capacity to enforce that order in the courts. And I think we have this.