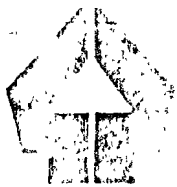


FILE NAME: Sprayed Asbestos (SPRA)

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From the Office of the Director

15 September 1978

Dear Member of Parliament

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC ACT 1974
ASBESTOS - HOUSE OF COMMONS

1. Following discussions with the Serjeant-at-Arms Office, I am writing to let you know of the action being taken to deal with asbestos present in the House of Commons building.
2. There are two main problems, namely:-
 - (a) The sprayed insulation in the roof space of the House of Commons Chamber.
 - (b) The internal linings of the ventilation ducts supplying air to most parts of the House of Commons complex.

The removal of white asbestos insulation from pipe-work which is being modified as part of the conversions to the central heating system is of a wholly conventional nature. It does not present the contractors or others with a problem, and no further reference is made to this matter in the remainder of this letter.

SPRAYED INSULATION IN THE COMMONS CHAMBER ROOF SPACE

3. This insulation contains a high percentage of crocidolite (blue asbestos). On inspection it was found that the existing sealing treatment was incomplete and that this sealing had been subsequently damaged by the activities (e.g. maintenance/alterations) of persons entering the roof space. The floor and other surfaces of the roof space were thus contaminated with crocidolite dust.
4. This roof space acts as a plenum duct for extracting air from the House of Commons Chamber itself. Whilst the House is sitting and the ventilation plant is running, forced air movement is upwards from the Commons Chamber into the roof space. It is therefore extremely unlikely that persons in the Chamber during sessions of the House have been exposed to crocidolite dust, although no air samples had been taken before remedial work started. Access

to the roof space itself has been restricted to PSA maintenance staff.

At HSE's request air samples in the roof space were taken and, with the extract system switched off, readings of 0.21, 0.13, 0.07, 0.03, 0.01 (8 readings) and less than 0.01 (4 readings) fibres/cu centimetre (fpcc) were found. The hygiene standard for crocidolite is 0.2 fpcc and entry to the roof space has been restricted to persons wearing suitable protective clothing and respiratory protective equipment.

Action on roof space insulation.

5. The contractor has already started re-sealing the roof space insulation and decontaminating the floor and other surfaces of the roof space. This treatment will effectively remove any immediate hazards, provided the activities of maintenance personnel are closely controlled. HSE has advised PSA however that the crocidolite insulation should be removed completely as soon as practicable. There will be close consultation between HSE and PSA on the precautions necessary for this removal work. Its timing will depend upon a number of factors, including the availability of access - the work cannot be done whilst the House is in session, and the House authorities will obviously be involved in reaching a decision on this.

ASBESTOS LINING IN VENTILATION DUCTS

6. Parts of the ventilation ducts which supply air to most areas of the House of Commons complex are lined internally with amosite (one of the forms of asbestos generically known as white asbestos). HSE requires precautions to be provided for a person working in a contaminated atmosphere for 8 hours per day if the amosite level is 2.0 fpcc or above. After the ventilation system had been switched off, air samples taken for PSA showed low levels of amosite contamination of the air in the ducts as follows:

0.01 (1 reading), less than 0.01 (12 readings) fpcc

No readings were taken either in the ducts or in the rooms supplied by the ventilation system whilst the system was operating. For this reason we do not know what amosite levels were encountered by persons working in these rooms while the ventilation system was operating. Further air samples are being taken to check on residual contamination of the rooms concerned.

Areas of building involved.

7. The ventilation system with amosite-lined duct sections supplies air to the following

complex:-

House of Commons Chamber itself, Division lobbies, Writing rooms, MPs' secretaries' offices, Ministers' offices, Hansard and Times offices, Reporters' writing rooms, Dining room and kitchen, Travel office (Thomas Cook), MPs' Post Office and Clerk of the House offices.

Persons who may be assumed to have been exposed to these low concentrations of amosite thus include MPs, staff of the House of Commons, MPs' secretaries, Reporters, Thomas Cook staff, Post Office staff, Metropolitan Police and the general public.

Agreed action on duct linings

8. The ventilation system has been shut down and the amosite duct linings are being completely removed. When the system is re-started, air measurements will be taken to determine the effectiveness of the remedial action. The work of the contractors is being carefully supervised by PSA, and the HSE is also carrying out periodic inspections of this work.

CURRENT ASBESTOS LEVELS IN COMMONS CHAMBER

9. After the ventilation system had been shut down for remedial action, air samples were taken on the floor of the Commons Chamber at HSE's request. Levels encountered in the Commons Chamber before the public were admitted were:

0.04 {3 readings}, 0.03 (3 readings), 0.02 (2 readings)
0.01 {6 readings} and less than 0.01 (2 readings) fpcc

Levels after public admission some days later were less than 0.02 (68 readings) fpcc. In addition, preliminary qualitative sampling has detected the presence of some crocidolite in addition to amosite in the Chamber. Further sampling is now being done with the object of quantifying the levels of crocidolite, but in view of the low levels of total asbestos there is no reason to anticipate that the crocidolite levels will approach the hygiene standard of 0.2 fpcc.

INFORMATION TO EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

10. HSE has an obligation under Section 28(8) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to give certain information to employees as to the facts ascertained and the action being taken by HSE. The required information is set out in the above paragraphs of this letter. The Serjeant-at-Arms has kindly agreed to circulate the information in this letter to representatives of the various categories of employees. These include staff of the House of Commons, Metropolitan Police,

Post Office, Thomas Cook, MPs' secretaries working in the House and Reporters.

11. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please get in touch with Mr R J Seymour, Area Director for London North West Area, at Chancel House, Neasden Lane, London NW10 - telephone 01 459 8844 - Extn. 369.

Yours faithfully,

for John Locke

RB
JOHN LOCKE
Director General HSE

PS: Since drafting this letter I have been informed by PSA that the work of re-sealing the roof space insulation, mentioned in paragraph 5 above, has now been completed.

RB