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By late 1968 Manville and Dr. Selikoff were in close, almost daily, contact. While we continued to fight it out in the media over many issues, there was one on which we could both agree: the insulation workers had a horrible health record and something needed to be done to address their working conditions. J-M agreed to fund an effort at Mount Sinai that came to be called the Industrial Insulation Health Research Program (IIHRP). Its primary purpose was to develop environmental control practices for reducing the asbestos exposure of the insulation workers to safe levels. A board of directors was created to oversee the project. It included government health officials, J-M's vice-presidents of manufacturing and R&D, Dr. Wright, Dr. Selikoff, and a number of others. J-M bought Mount Sinai a state of the art electron microscope and assigned a top-notch industrial hygienist to work in residence with the Mount Sinai staff. Communications support was to be provided by Hill and Knowlton with Carl Thompson, an H&K executive vice-president and head of the firm's Environmental Health Unit, which handled the J-M account, becoming the defect head of PR for the IIHRP.

From a communications standpoint the joint effort worked fine. The venture was launched with considerable public fanfare with a press conference at Mount Sinai — Dr. Selikoff turned the media out in droves — and lots of smiles, handshakes, and pledges of eternal cooperation. Thompson wrote and produced the program's periodic newsletter, sent out press releases on various program accomplishments, and even ghostwrote an article for Dr. Selikoff for an occupational hygiene journal. Clearly, Manville's image was enhanced by its involvement in the IIHRP effort, but it continued to be the only asbestos company in the U.S. speaking out in defense of the industry when it came under attack. That was soon to change.

For years H&K had been urging that J-M set up a trade association in the United States to handle the communications aspects of the asbestos issue. The firm's London office had set up such a group, called the Asbestos Information Council, for the British asbestos industry, and H&K argued that a U.S. counterpart would provide the same two major benefits to Manville. First, by establishing an umbrella group to handle communications, it would reduce J-M's own individual media exposure; and second, it would create a voice that would speak for the entire U.S. industry and not just for one company.

The reasoning was persuasive, and in late 1970, a meeting of seven or eight of the major U.S. asbestos companies was convened in J-M's headquarters. Manville was viewed with some suspicion by the industry because of its close association with Dr. Selikoff, whom they totally distrusted in the IIHRP program.

Industry Umbrella Opened

