

FILE NAME: General Motors (GM)

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Memo RE Dr. M.E. Gibson to Mike Cassidy from Barry Castleman

Feb. 1, 1996

To: Mike Cassidy

From: Barry Castleman

Re: Dr. M. E. Gibson

Baron & Budd document people sent up more material they got from the Manville files, relating to meetings with General Motors Inland division in 1969-70. The 1970 note, attached, shows that our man's name is Dr. Merle E. Gibson, and that he remained skeptical of Johns-Manville propaganda on the innocuousness of asbestos. This memo, by J-M technology specialist Sidney Speil, shows the G.M. men were worried about asbestos in brake lining decomposition products. Dr. George Rappaport, the Inland chemist, and Dr. Gibson, seemed interested in subjecting brake drum dust to tests of biological activity; and they were also interested in calculating the emission of asbestos from brakes to the ambient air. They were even talking about having G.M. hire Selikoff's people at Mt. Sinai to do some research.

ND I have called Ms. Marise Burger, who has worked at Mt. Sinai for many years, to inquire if they have any additional information or documentation about Dr. Gibson and General Motors communications with Mt. Sinai. Marise will ask Bill Nicholson, among others. If Bill knew Dr. Gibson, maybe he can provide some foundation for the introduction and explanation of these documents.

In Dayton area, Dr. Merle E. Gibson is listed at 513-898-4441. He will not be back in until next Tuesday, unfortunately. His assistant said he left Inland division about 3-4 years ago. I left word that I am writing a revision of my book on asbestos and wanted to put Dr. Gibson in it. I said I'd come across some documents from 1969-1970 and was interested in speaking with him. I did not mention that G.M. is presently on trial in a damage suit.

The union man from Dayton said Dr. Gibson was "good on asbestos" and generally liked by the workers, according to my contact at the Steelworkers. What we have so far is certainly consistent with that appraisal.

I expect that, as soon as these J-M documents are shown to the G.M. lawyers in your case, assuming you plan to introduce them, that G.M. will seek to get Dr. Gibson to do some damage control for them in the Shroeder case. Failing that, they may try to scare him away from getting involved with plaintiffs in this and other similar cases.

It might also be interesting to contact George Rappaport.

I look forward to speaking with you tomorrow morning.

Call to Dr. Merle E. Gibson

Feb. 6, 1996

He was Medical Director for Inland Division of General Motors from 1963-1990, is now in private practice in Dayton a mile away from the GM brake manufacturing plant. He also sees cases, including "lots" of asbestosis and related cancers, for the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation.

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At GM, Gibson was in charge of 60 nurses, 5 industrial hygienists. He was responsible for 20,000 workers, 1000-2000 in brake products manufacturing. They conducted annual physicals, bought an electron microscope, did sputum studies for asbestos. At first, they thought that cancer was only a problem with asbestosis as a pre-condition. He became fascinated with asbestos, visited J-M "many times" including the asbestos mines, and worked 2 weeks with Selikoff, for whom he retains "great respect," in the 1970s. He says Selikoff told him that his research at GM made him one of the 10 leading U.S. experts on asbestos disease. One thing they studied was "brake stops" and their release of asbestos.

He attended "76 OSHA closing conferences," appeared in District Court, and even appeared before a Senate subcommittee after being coached "tremendously" by GM lawyers. (I think that last was on asbestos but am not sure of it.) He says he also handled tort ("that's a dirty word") litigation against GM.

Another use of asbestos was in firewalls of cars, which was converted to fiber-glass in the 1980s.

Dr. G. knew from 1963 that asbestos was a "vicious material" whose use warranted stringent control. Within a year of going to work for GM, he asked the GM Executive Committee to pay to install extensive dust controls inside the plant where asbestos was used. Despite the cost of \$7 million, "they bought right into it." Before that, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, conditions were controlled little if at all. Their annual screenings for asbestosis must have turned up cases, but I didn't ask about that.

Despite his willingness to speak with me and answer questions, he repeatedly emphasized his loyalty to GM.

He was most worried about the use of compressed air by brake mechanics to blow out brake dust, and **in the early 1960s** GM told its dealers to not use compressed air to blow out brakes, use suction and damp cloths instead, dust mask also mentioned. If this wasn't Gibson's idea, which I think it was, he sure is intimately familiar with it, recalling those details from so long ago. It would be interesting to see the various versions of the notice to GM dealerships that have gone out since 1963; at a 1985 meeting with EPA, the GM men said "GM recommends that its dealers use vacuum or wet methods during brake work" according to the EPA memo of the meeting of June 5, 1985.

He readily recalled the Jan. 1969 meeting with Dr. Wright and the asbestos industry guys. It was stormy, adversarial. The asbestos industry guys wanted GM to help present a united front, and Gibson was telling them GM could go to semi-metallic brakes and, "without much trouble" get out of asbestos altogether. That was an overstatement, probably, but the asbestos-free, semi-metallic brakes were well along by 1969. "We responded that if 1 fiber has X potential, a million fibers could have 100X potential" to cause cancer. "I represented GM in that meeting."

Later, measuring asbestos in ambient air, Dr. Gibson recalled that they found more asbestos in the ambient air than they had in the air inside the plant. He thought it was safer working in the asbestos area than in other areas of the plant where they used solvents, toluene diisocyanate, etc.

He says his library is crammed with asbestos literature. He thinks that Nicholson's estimate of 10,000 deaths a year from asbestos cancers is too low. He sees lots of lung cancer and suspects a role for asbestos in every one. On the other hand, he thinks chrysotile isn't that bad compared to amosite and seemed unaware that chrysotile as well had been implicated in household contact mesothelioma.

After the call, I slightly revised my text insert for the next edition of my book and sent it by fax, requesting same-day confirmation of the truth of the text, explaining that it was mainly referenced to J-M memos. Dr. Gibson faxed the text page back, signed, dated, and marked "Approved."

General Motors

Baron & Budd has tried to get GM to produce documents in discovery, and they told me they got nothing. I have called Rob Struven for details, specifically asking if GM withheld information that would have led to Dr. Merle Gibson and the documentation he created during his years with GM (1963-1990).

There are a number of things that would be interesting to explore with Dr. Gibson.

What reports did he write that dealt with asbestos problems specifically, and what reports did he do periodically that would have touched upon asbestos (e.g., annual reports of the Medical Director)?

In particular, were there annual or other periodic reports on the health status of GM employees exposed to asbestos?

Were there regular reports on asbestos concentrations in GM plants?

When did Dr. G see his first cases of asbestosis and asbestos-related cancer in GM employees?

Who were these workers, and were they told by GM that they had asbestos-related conditions?

When did GM start doing studies on asbestos exposures from brake repair?

When did GM begin doing studies on asbestos released from brake stops?

Who were the investigators, in the early brake stop tests?

What did the tests show about asbestos fiber survival in brake decomposition dust?

Was it Dr. G's opinion that there was any safe level of asbestos release into the atmosphere from brake stops?

When were the first reports of brake stop tests completed?

When were the first of these reports to be published or publicly disclosed outside of GM?

Were GM's warning notices to dealerships about brake repair hazards from compressed air "blow-out" sent before or after tests were done to see how much asbestos was in the dust cloud the worker created?

Were the warnings to the dealerships against compressed air in brake repair sent out based simply on the assumption that there had to be asbestos exposure because the brake products were half asbestos and there was so much dust from brake "blow-out"?

Who were the industrial hygienists he worked with (he says 5 worked under his direction)? Which ones were most involved in handling asbestos problems? What reports did they write about asbestos exposures and control measures?

What were all the uses of asbestos at GM Inland Division, in automobile manufacture? Which of these uses were eliminated, and when?

What can he tell about the GM Institute for Industrial Hygiene at University of Michigan?
What acquaintanceship, correspondence, and discussions about asbestos did he have with these GM doctors and industrial hygienists?

Dr. Carey McCord?

Dr. Earl F. Lutz?

Dr. Clarence Selby?

Frank Patty?

Vincent Castrop?

When he had that stormy meeting with the asbestos people at George Wright's office in Cleveland in 1969, what was the state of development of (asbestos-free) semi-metallic brakes that he represented to the asbestos men?

Who were the GM technical experts in the development of semimetallic brakes?

Was he involved in drafting a policy paper for GM, issued September 7, 1979, "General Motors Programs on Non-Asbestos Friction Materials for Brake Systems"?

[This and related file papers should be subpoenaed from GM]

If not, was he aware that this paper was issued by the company?

Is he aware that this statement projected that all cars with drum brakes and light trucks would have asbestos-free brakes by the 1985 model year?

Was there a greater profit margin on asbestos-containing brakes than on non-asbestos brakes, or were there other business reasons (e.g., new plant investment) for the company to delay substituting asbestos in brakes??

Was there a change of policy after the election of President Reagan, to delay the replacement of asbestos in brakes? What does he know about that?

Was asbestos still used in the brakes of cars and light trucks when Dr. G retired in 1990?

When did GM begin sending notices to dealerships warning against the use of compressed air hoses in brake repair work? Were these notices directed toward management only, or were they also intended to reach the mechanics?

How did that idea get raised (by Dr. G?), who was involved in approving it?

At any time, did the text of this notice to GM dealerships change?

Were these notices to dealerships sent during the entire time of Dr. G's service with GM?

Was the question raised at any time that non-GM brake mechanics should also be warned against blowing out brakes with compressed air hoses?

Starting with his approach to the GM Executive Committee to get authorization for industrial ventilation at the brake manufacturing plant in 1963, what meetings did he have with executive management about asbestos problems, and what was discussed?

Can he recall specific executives who were supportive of his efforts to control asbestos hazards and substitute asbestos at GM?

What does he recall about contacts with OSHA on asbestos at GM?

What did he appear in District Court about regarding asbestos?

What did he appear about before a Senate subcommittee, and when was that?

What involvement did he have in tort litigation, over asbestos, at GM?

What does he have in his library of asbestos materials?