PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT
CSR - 850

*** Reference number- 7976
:NO 640727.002
:TL Copy memo ABA Sydney to M.G. King * Asbestosis and silicosis; Dust sampling.
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:TY LETTER
:LO ROBINSON COX 30 C
:CA CASE -Castellano
DD NO. - 284
PD NO. - 0
EX NO. - 0
MFI NO. - 0
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:AD THERE ARE NOTES ATTACHED
:TT ***Page

MEMORANDUM TO: Mr M G King.

ABA WITTENOOM.

Asbestosis and Silicosis.

During a recent visit to Wittenoom, I discussed the dust problem with the Assistant Manager, Mr Stevenson and the Ventilation Officer, Mr Mulholland.

Mill. Dust collection in the mill is already considerably improved with the Amerjet installation. It seems that when the installation is fully completed, the amount of dust exhausted to the atmosphere will be negligible.

The principal danger areas for dust in the mill then will be the packing station, and the floors in general. People moving about will stir up the dust deposited on the floors.

There is a reasonably good acceptance by mill employees of wearing respirators provided.

It seems possible that the industrial disease risk among mill employees will be minimised in the near future.

Mine. Prevention of industrial disease in the mine will depend on improvement of mine ventilation. This will be made considerably easier if the system of long wall stoping is adopted generally.

With the existing system of mining, the miner is vulnerable particularly when the hole is being collared. The scraping operation gives rise to a considerable amount of dust and scrapermen are particularly vulnerable. It seems that it will be possible to position scrapermen in such a way as to give them an ample supply of fresh air with the adoption of long wall stoping.

Mr Stevenson considers that the mine ventilation would be greatly assisted by the provision of a fresh air shaft covering the northern area of the mine if the ore body justifies this.

It seems that an extra fan will be necessary to cope with ventilation if long wall stoping is not adopted.

Dust Sampling.

All dust sampling for the mine and the mill is a present done by the ventilation officer, Mr Mulholland, who is also an underground shift boss.

Mr Mulholland uses a konimeter for determining dust counts. This instrument is not favoured for the determination of asbestos concentration in air by the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine attached to Sydney University. This School is recognised to be an authority on industrial dust contamination from the factory employment rather than the public point of view. They regard the konimeter as being suitable for the determination of silica concentration.

The konimeter method of sampling is said to provide misleading results with asbestos because it prevents entry of some particles to the sampling body of the instrument and thereby tends to underestimate the concentration. The velocity of entry results in some break up of particles with a consequent overestimation.

Mulholland carries out dust sampling in the mine at the breathing area of the various employees. He takes two readings of the konimeter and expresses this as a "particle per cc" concentration.

A midget impinger is located at the mine. This is regarded by the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine as being a suitable device for measuring asbestos concentrations. It is not very portable and the determination of the dust count is by microscope. A suitable microscope is not available at Wittenoom.

Mulholland is adept at using the konimeter, but would not be able to use the midget impinger without training.

It would seem that our knowledge of the dust in air concentrations in the various areas of Wittenoom may not be factual at present.

General.

Asbestosis may be contracted after short exposure. One authority states that the minimum exposure time for contracting the disease is two weeks.

With Wittenoom's high labour turnover and this low exposure time, it could be that the number of cases will increase fairly rapidly beyond the present 21 cases attributed to Wittenoom of asbestosis, silicosis and silico asbestosis.

This possibility is causing concern at present to the WA Health Department and to the Workers Compensation Board.

The periodic X-ray survey of Wittenoom employees has recently been completed. So far we do not know if the number of cases is greater than the 21 cases mentioned above, which were the findings of the 1963 survey.

Recommendations.

1. We should consider whether our picture of the dust problem at Wittenoom is accurate (in view of the use of the konimeter for sampling).

2. We should ask for regular dust reports from Wittenoom, at least on a 6 monthly basis.

3. We should receive from Perth the findings of the periodic X-ray examinations of Wittenoom employees.

4. I should examine James Hardie's handling of the problem (both from the point of view of the Sydney plant and the South African mine) by discussion with appropriate officers in Sydney.

SYDNEY 27th July, 1964.