Asbestos Information Association North America

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The Editor
The New York Times Magazine
229 West 43 Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Sir:

Robert Sherrill's one-sided and sensationalized article, "Asbestos, the saver of lives, has a deadly side" (January 21,), contained many errors of fact and interpretation. The following should help clarify a few of his more blatant omissions and distortions.

1. Because of the long latent period of asbestos related disease, the disease being found today is not an indication of present conditions but is instead a result of conditions existing decades ago, at a time when neither the medical profession, government nor the industry knew very much about the health effects of asbestos and even less about the proper means for their control.

2. The isolated incidents cited as proof of industry indifference and irresponsibility are not indicative of the overall industry response to this problem. In the past decade alone, the asbestos manufacturing industry has spent approximately $110 million on dust control and expects to spend an additional $95 million over the next few years to achieve complete compliance with the final Labor Department standards.

3. No mention was made whatever of the highly respected and extensive medical research which has been sponsored, co-sponsored or cooperated in by the industry through the years, and which has contributed significantly to our knowledge of the biological effects of asbestos. In fact, the Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health, sponsored by the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association, is one of the world's largest non-governmental sources of funds for asbestos-health research.

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4. While Dr. Selikoff has certainly made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of asbestos-related disease, it is unfortunate that Mr. Sherrill did not discuss the situation with any of the other top authorities in the field since many of them do not believe that many of Dr. Selikoff's recent frightening predictions are justified by the printed medical data.

5 The Labor Department decision to delay adoption of the two fiber standard for an additional two years beyond the two year implementation period recommended by NIOSH and the Advisory Committee was approved by Dr. Marcus M. Key, Director of NIOSH, prior to the publication of the standards. Furthermore, Dr. Key is in total disagreement with Dr. Selikoff's prediction that half of all those entering the asbestos industry within the next four years will die because of the delay in going to two fibers.

We believe that the above facts demonstrate quite clearly the incomplete and distorted manner in which Mr. Sherrill presented the asbestos-health situation in his article.

Very truly yours,

Matthew M. Swetonic

Matthew M. Swetonic
Executive Secretary

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