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Johns-Manville Project on Selikoff Program

September 19, 1968

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This is a skeletonized rundown on a new project given us by Solon and Raines of Johns-Manville Wednesday. It's really a checklist of what we have to do, with some immediate assignment suggestions. If you have thoughts about anything I've left out, shoot them on. As all should know, we need to get this into action just as soon as possible, and are aiming for a date not later than the week of October 14.

1. Project Assignment: H&K, at request of J-M, is to give all assistance possible -- which really means do much of the work -- to Mt. Sinai Hospital's School of Medicine's Environmental Sciences Laboratory's public relations people in making a major news story out of the announcement of a new research program. Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, director of the Environmental Sciences Laboratory, is the Program Director. The Program is the Insulation Industry Hygiene Research Program. This is being financed by the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers, Albert E. Hutchinson, president; and the asbestos industry, namely, Johns-Manville Corporation, J. B. (Bert) Jobe, vice president of J-M. The Division of Occupational Health, U.S. Public Health Service, is at least inspirationally involved, Dr. Murray Brown, director. Details of the program will be forthcoming, but essentially, it is an in-depth research on causes and prevention of occupational health problems involved in insulating work, especially relating to working with asbestos.

2. H&K will want to prepare a press kit of pictures and stories of this. We have to decide what the basic elements of this kit should be.

3. Preliminary thoughts are that the announcement and press kit distribution should be made at a press conference at Mt. Sinai with Selikoff as leader, along with union, industry and PHS representatives, probably those named above.

4. More detailed information on the project is an immediate need. Thompson is to begin collecting such information Thursday, September 19, with an interview with Jobe of J-M. Presumably, this will follow with interviews with Selikoff and Hutchinson.

5. H&K has to establish how and how much this is a "first" -- of a jointly-financed study with union, industry and science on an occupational health problem. Does anyone know of similar effort? Ideas for verifying this "first?" Check with PHS, NIOSH, Department of Labor, Murray Brown? Others?

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6. We will want to check Selikoff's testimony on the Occupational Safety and Health bill before the House committee earlier this year and his talk to the Union for his "line." Will Jenkins get this material out.

7. Will Zahn please check week of October 14 to see if there are any major medical/scientific meetings that might conflict with a preff conference or take too many science writers out of New York City area.

8. Will Jenkins check publicity department to see what lead time major news magazines may need for press kits to be sure to get in issues contemporary with press conference. For example, will a Monday press conference do for magazines coming out on Tuesday, if they have material in advance? Zahn, what you think? How about in relation to medical news journals -- Medical Tribune, AMA News, Medical World News, etc.?

9. As soon as possible we will want to get underway plan for endorsement and praise for this project by others -- such as HEW Secretary Cohen -- preferably to have with press kit and conference.

10. Most importantly, we will have to keep in mind the negatives of such an announcement and how best to make these positives. In brief, some of these are:

   A. Making sure all statements for participants point out that the problem is occupational and doesn't involve a public risk.

   B. Playing up the cooperative effort rather than the problem being studied. This may not be completely possible, obviously.

   C. Describing the problem in terms of need for knowing more about it rather than a broad, accepted hazard.

   D. Describing the research in terms of reducing exposure to possible health risks of inhaling asbestos to lowest possible levels regardless of whether there is known health risks involved at current exposures.

   E. Attempting to keep all participants right on the subject, and not (in Q&A for example) going off into speculations related to the occupational health of the workers. (e.g., stay off brake linings, mesotheliomas, ambient air, etc.)

   F. Giving the major play to Selikoff and his group and to Murray Brown and his group, while emphasizing this as an outstanding and trail-blazing example of industry-union-scientist-government cooperative effort.

11. Obviously, the raw materials for carrying out this program are not now at hand. As indicated, we are going to get the basics from those involved. Jenkins can begin drafting for our information the basic background of what's involved and the plan of research intended.

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12. Zahn should begin preparing for invitation list for press conference, other lists for mailing and other distribution of kits, and for cooperation with Mt. Sinai's School of Medicine's public relations people. Any Mt. Sinai public relations contact should definitely await our first contact with Selikoff, who will probably open the doors for this.

We will have an EHU staff session on these points and other suggestions at our first opportunity after we have a little more specific information. Meanwhile, any thoughts, jot down.

C.T.

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