THE ASBESTOS INFORMATION COMMITTEE

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K.J L...cc

Dear Mr Solon,

I thought it would be useful if I put on record to you the points made at the meeting in London yesterday of representatives of the Asbestos Fibre Importers Committee and the Asbestos Information Committee (representing Turner & Newall Ltd, Cape Asbestos Co Ltd, B B A Group Ltd and Central Asbestos Co Ltd). I am sure that you must have left the meeting aware of the fact that the anxiety expressed to you regarding the decision of Canadian Johns-Manville to introduce a cautionary label onto paper bags, even if this is intended only for bags shipped to the US market, is felt universally by the representatives of British fibre importers and asbestos manufacturers.

The anxieties expressed could be summarised as follows -

1. It will not be possible to draw a ring round the USA and assume that what happens there will not have international repercussions because -
   (a) there are international labour organisations who might circulate such information, and
   (b) medical experts with an interest in members of labour unions could encourage their opposite numbers in other countries to press for similar steps to be taken there.

2. Dockers and seamen may see these labels in the holds of ships intended for destinations other than Britain and draw their own conclusions about the unlabelled asbestos cargo they were to unload themselves.

3. Because dockers have been scared by adverse publicity, London docks have been virtually closed to all asbestos cargoes for over a year and bagged asbestos is now only being received at three British ports. This situation is extremely delicate. It could be disastrous if the backwash of the CMJ action caused difficulties at these three ports.

Cont/d

4. The British asbestos industry has so far successfully discouraged the British Factory Inspectorate from insisting on cautionary labels with a specific reference to health, and in the Draft Asbestos Regulations just published has managed to confine the use of any cautionary label at all to blue asbestos. The wording on the label will simply say "Blue asbestos, do not inhale dust".

We all feel that if a precedent is set for chrysotile bags to carry a cautionary label of any kind and this is then incorporated as a result in USA regulations, there is a real risk that the British Factory Inspectorate could follow suit, quoting Canadian/American practice.

5. If bags carrying cautionary labels reached European factories, they could cause disquiet among operatives before management was prepared with the necessary knowledge to install appropriate protection equipment and personal protection. This disquiet could filter back via the ports (the same argument may well of course apply within the USA, i.e. the first priority should perhaps be given to educating the management of asbestos users, with a view to their introducing an adequate hygiene programme, rather than running the risk of upsetting their industrial relations with operatives by sending in marked bags before they were adequately prepared.)

6. There is always a risk that sooner or later paper bags bearing the cautionary label would be sent to Britain inadvertently or because we decided to accept paper bags shipped on pallets.

We all appreciate, of course, that the motives which inspire the CMJ action regarding labels are of the highest, but experience here would seem to indicate that the wisest approach to this problem is to give priority to making users' processes safe and to local education of operatives rather than to draw open attention to the health risk.

Yours sincerely,

W.P. Howard

V P HOWARD
Secretary

VPH/SK