February 19, 1959

The Detroit Edison Company
2000 Second Avenue
Detroit 26, Michigan

Attention: Mr. W. C. Dunlap

Gentlemen:

Recently you requested information on the possible health hazards associated with some of our products. Your letter was forwarded to us for reply. It is a pleasure to offer you the following details.

Thermobestos

Thermobestos consists primarily of calcium silicate and a small percentage of asbestos fibre. Calcium silicate is not pneumoconiosis producing and the asbestos fibre represents only approximately 10% plus or minus of the mix.

The threshold limit list of the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists suggests a limit of 5 million particles per cubic foot for asbestos. Assuming that the airborne dust would approximate the material ratios of the product, this would indicate that dust levels approaching 50 million particles per cubic foot would not contain an excessive amount of asbestos fibre.

Mineral Wool

To the best of our knowledge our Mineral Fiber does not contain any free silica, nor does it produce any form of pulmonary fibrosis or pneumoconiosis. For your reference I have enclosed a copy of a paper by L. T. Fairhall et al, entitled, "Rock Wool In Relation To Health". Unfortunately, I do not have any additional copies of a further reference, "Negative Chest Findings In A Mineral Wool Industry" by J. L. Carpenter and L. W. Spelyer. This appeared in the "Journal Indiana State Medical Association", Volume 38 in 1945. The summary of this article was:

1. 84 workers exposed to mineral wool for periods ranging from 7 to 29 years showed no x-ray evidence of silicosis or fibrosis of the lungs.

2. The exaggerated linear findings exhibited were shown to be a characteristic of that community for that same age group.

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A survey was conducted some years ago by the Industrial Health Section of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company at one of our plants where mineral wool had been manufactured for nearly forty years. This survey was most thorough and included the examination of x-rays of four hundred employees, a great majority of whom had been engaged in the manufacturing and handling of mineral wool for more than ten years, a large number for more than twenty-five years. Not a single case of silicosis or even of abnormal lung fibrosis was discovered as a result of these examinations and we were advised that we might safely conclude that mineral wool was "innocuous from the point of lung fibrosis".

Occasionally, cases of skin irritation have been noted among those who handle mineral wool. This usually occurs during hot summer months when men are working under conditions which cause them to perspire freely. When it does occur it is seen more readily in fair-skinned individuals.

For the occasional case who exhibits the irritating effects of an initial exposure, the reaction can be minimized if the employee will wear long sleeves and keep his collar buttoned around his neck. A shower bath at the end of the work day will also help to remove any particles which might adhere to the skin. Protective skin barrier creams may be of some value for the hands but above all, the employee should be reassured that any rash which does develop is not progressive and should disappear.

Asbestos Fibre

It is a recognized fact that continued inhalation of asbestos fibre in sufficient quantities over a long enough period of time may cause some pulmonary changes. However, in our mines and mills where approximately two thousand people are producing in excess of 500,000 tons of asbestos annually, we have developed no new cases of asbestosis for many years.

We believe that proper material handling methods as well as local ventilation will remove any health hazard which might exist. If working conditions are such that these suggestions cannot be followed, employees should wear respirators which are approved by the U. S. Bureau of Mines for pneumonoconiosis-producing dusts.

For your information, I also am enclosing two reprints on the subject of asbestosis. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Kenneth W. Smith, M.D.
Medical Director

Enc. (3)

cc: R. E. Shoens, Detroit
J. K. Johnson, Cleveland
H. M. Ball

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