MINISTERE DE LA SANTE
Hotel du Gouvernement
Quebec
Division De la Demographie

MINISTRY OF HEALTH
Parliament Buildings
Quebec
Division of Demography

QUEBEC, May 24th, 1949.

Mr. W. H. Soutar,
Ass't to Mine Manager,
Canadian Johns-Manville Co., Limited,
ASBESTOS, P. Q.

Dear Sir:

At your request, I have taken cognisance of the various articles in some newspapers and dealing with the question of the mortality from tuberculosis in the asbestos mining district.

It is my pleasure, and duty I believe, to give my opinion and relative comments on the matter. However, and in the very first place, I wish to emphasise the stand I desire to hold : that I shall confine those comments to the statistical aspect of the problem only.

In the accompanying table, which will be of great asistance in the following study, I have compiled the crude totals of deaths from tuberculosis with those from cancer, violence (all kinds of accidents) and heart diseases. This first comparison is intended to demonstrate that tuberculosis is NOT the leading cause of death in the mining cities, nor in any other. Same table then compares the same totals (and please notice that we are here dealing with totals not rates - the latter being mostly the time misleading for the general public) in Thetford-Mines and Asbestos with those in six other cities where the social and occupational levels are about identical. This "urban" comparison is intended to show that the mortality from tuberculosis is not · heavier in Thetford-Mines or Asbestos than in any city. Finally, same table establishes a third comparison over a period of five years (1943 to 1947,latest available figures), as to prove that if there exists a variation, the

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latter is merely "annual" and without any significance whatsoever. Besides all this, the totals are broken down in relation to sex and this illustrates that, in Thetford-Mines, the number of women dying from tuberculosis is sometimes larger than the number of men, which leads us to conclude that the "employment" alone cannot be regarded as "exposure" to the disease.

Before analysing some of these data, it seems appropriate to consider three important facts:

1. The death rate from tuberculosis in Thetford-Mines has been published as 236.1 in 1944. This rate is exact, but its publication as such was erroneous in its underlying significance. I observe that the publication of this rate was made on May 14th, and wonder why the rate of 1944 has been used and not that of 1945 or 1946, both of which were available? In 1944, the rate of 236.1 for Thetford-Mines is exact as already explained, but the rate of 1945 [illegible]7.1 and that of 1946,137.1, both rates being evidently much lower. Was there any motive for using only the rate of 1944?

2. From this we observe quite a variation between 1944 and 1945. How does it come that this rate registers such a sharp decline in one single year? The explanation is that, inclusive of and prior to 1944 we were (in Canada as a whole) tabulating all deaths by places of occurrence, while, with 1945 and since, we are now compiling by places of residence. The latter method is internationally accepted as a truer picture of any demographic situation. The place of death does not matter much nowadays that a person can go hundreds of miles away from home for treatment, but the residence of the deceased is more logical as a basis for analysis. As a consequence of this, the rate of 236.1 for Thetford-Mines in 1944 thus includes a certain number

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of deaths which occurred in that city of people who were not residents of the city, while the rate of 117.1 in 1945 does consider only deaths of residents of the city, no matter the place of their death. So, when publishing the 1944 rate, a similar explanation should have been provided, and mainly because this rate has been compared with those of Granby and Sorel, in which cities no institution for the treatment of tuberculosis is located. My belief is that the comparison was dishonest.

3. Dealing with rates, either general or specific (a T.B. rate is always specific) is somewhat misleading and great precaution has to be used in their production. As a rule, rates are a fair way of study if derived from a grand total. For instance, when we say that the tuberculosis rate, for the province, was in 1946 of 72.1 per 100,000 population, this is easily understood. On the other hand, if such a rate is established for a small population, it has always to be borne in mind that so many factors are being involved that the rates lose its significance. It is much better to work with the crude totals of deaths which everyone understand, and this explains why the enclosed table has been built up with those numbers only.

Let us now consider a few of these numbers and, to abbreviate, only those of 1947. We then see that in Thetford-Mines there were 29 deaths from tuberculosis, 23 from cancer, 4 from violence (all kinds of accidents) and 32 from heart diseases. In that city, tuberculosis thus comes in the second place, not very far ahead of cancer, while heart diseases claimed only three more victims. But when we consider the sex distribution, we find that there were 16 men and 13 women, (looking to 1946 there were only 22 deaths : 7 men and 15 women) : can we conclude from this that tuberculosis is the first cause of death amongst the miners?

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What is the situation in the other urban centres?

Asbestos : 5 deaths from T.B. against 4 cancer, 4 accidents and 13 heart diseases.

Valleyfield : 15 T.B., 19 cancer, 6 accidents, 34 heart.

St.Hyacinthe : 15 T.B., 37 cancer, 7 accidents, 63 heart.

Jonquiere : 32 T.B., 9 cancer, 13 accidents, 14 heart, etc.

After all, comparing the mortality of these cities for tuberculosis only, Jonquiere registers 32 deaths, Chicoutimi : 24; St.Hyacinthe and Valleyfield : 15 each against the 29 in Thetford-Mines and the 5 in Asbestos. Is there such an extraordinary prevalence of tuberculosis in the Asbestos Mining District? I think that some other cities register as many, if not more deaths from tuberculosis and the conclusion comes to the mind : why should only the situation of Thetford-Mines be "publicized" ?

As stated in the beginning, I have confined the above remarks to the statistical data only, with the hope that they may be of assistance to all. Statistics are very important but their value is derived from the "objective" which one has in mind.

Yours very truly,
Dr. Paul Parrot,
(Signed) Paul Parrot, M.D.

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TABLE PREPARED BY PAUL PARROT, M.D. [illegible],

Ministry of Health, Parliament Buildings, Quebec.

TOTAL DEATHS FROM TUBERCULOSIS, and other comparative causes, from 1943 to 1947, in THETFORD MINES and ASBESTOS, and other comparative cities.

		TUBERCULOSIS			CANCER			VIOLENCE (all kinds of accidents)			HEART		
		T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
THETFORD MINES	1943	28	24	28	26	11	5	14	11	3	28	25	9
	1944	32	19	13	15	3	6	10	7	3	35	20	14
	1945	16	8	8	13	6	7	7	6	1	27	13	14
	1946	22	7	15	13	7	6	10	10	0	28	18	10
	1947	29	16	13	23	14	9	4	2	2	38	24	14
ASBESTOS	1943	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	6	3	3
	1944	4	3	1	4	0	4	2	0	2	3	2	1
	1945	5	2	3	7	4	3	6	5	1	7	3	4
	1946	5	4	1	5	1	4	4	2	2	7	3	4
	1947	5	0	5	4	2	2	4	4	0	13	9	4
VALLEYFIELD	1943	10	5	5	19	10	9	14	11	3	23	10	13
	1944	17	3	14	21	10	11	9	7	2	23	11	12
	1945	14	8	6	22	10	12	8	7	1	26	12	14
	1946	15	8	7	23	13	14	13	8	5	28	17	11
	1947	15	7	8	19	14	5	6	5	1	14	10	14
ST-HYACINTHE	1943	19	5	14	43	17	26	16	14	2	24	12	12
	1944	19	4	15	46	18	28	10	7	3	25	14	11
	1945	15	5	10	32	11	21	11	5	6	28	12	16
	1946	27	11	16	35	13	22	9	3	6	33	16	17
	1947	15	8	7	37	15	22	7	6	1	28	13	15
LA TUQUE	1943	5	4	1	14	9	5	8	8	0	9	6	3
	1944	15	9	6	6	1	5	8	6	2	14	10	4
	1945	12	6	6	9	6	3	7	6	1	4	1	3
	1946	12	4	8	10	5	5	5	4	1	12	6	6
	1947	7	2	5	10	7	3	4	2	2	12	8	4
RIMOUSKI	1943	60	27	33	17	8	9	10	7	3	16	4	12
	1944	12	5	7	8	4	4	7	4	3	9	1	8
	1945	6	1	5	4	0	4	8	7	1	11	1	10
	1946	11	6	5	14	6	8	2	1	1	11	4	7
	1947	11	2	9	9	6	3	6	2	4	16	8	8
CHICOUTIMI	1943	48	19	29	28	17	11	24	18	6	28	17	11
	1944	28	6	22	28	17	11	8	7	1	29	18	11
	1945	21	8	13	28	17	11	14	8	6	29	18	11
	1946	20	9	11	28	17	11	13	9	4	29	18	11
	1947	24	13	11	28	17	11	13	9	4	29	18	11
[illegible]	1943	12	8	4	11	6	5	2	1	1	11	6	5
	1944	23	11	12	11	6	5	2	1	1	11	6	5
	1945	23	11	12	11	6	5	2	1	1	11	6	5
	1946	23	11	12	11	6	5	2	1	1	11	6	5
	1947	23	11	12	11	6	5	2	1	1	11	6	5