December 8, 1948

J. E. Morrison - Asbestos

As indicated in T. W. Burns letter of 11/30 I am very much interested in the problems of respirator requirements.

At best, respirators are a 'last resort' for protection and have been rather humorously described as "a muzzle type ornament loosely pendant from the neck and used in dirty industries to distinguish the laborers from the office employees". However, when we have engineered the job to the best of our ability and toxic contamination still is present, respirators are a desirable and necessary means of protection.

The building into the job standards allowances for the wearing of respirators when needed is advisable. Respirators, to be effective, must filter out the contaminant. The resistance resulting from the filter, does make breathing more of a chore - and therefore disagreeable. In addition there is the discomfort of the respirator bulk on the face.

For comfort, respirators of a very light weight can be worn for "nuisance" dusts; i.e., non-toxic dusts. For toxic exposures, the respirator should be of a design carrying the U. S. Bureau of Mines approval for that type of exposure.

Materials vary in their toxicity, and as a guide in determining unsafe exposures, Maximum Allowable Concentration (MAC) standards have been developed. Visual examination is not necessarily a reliable means of determining contamination. For example, it is the microscopic particles of silica (5/2500 of an inch or less) which are responsible for silicosis. The larger, visible particles do not contribute. So the problem is somewhat complicated by the fact that it requires special routines to determine when a hazard does exist.

This fact also complicates supervisions task in getting respirators worn when they are necessary. The danger in an unguarded shear or press can be easily and dramatically demonstrated. But the hazard of an almost invisible, slow acting toxic material - is difficult to put across. Some plants have been successful in getting respirators worn by educating the men to the hazard potential of the materials involved and the function of the respirator in hazard control. The hazard might be compared to that involved in crossing a heavily trafficked street. There's plenty of hazard potential there, but with reasonable safe practice no disability will result. The football player's speed might be reduced a bit by the weight of his protective equipment, but he'll play a great many more games, than he would without it.

We do have in our J-M processes a number of toxic materials which must be kept in control. Silex, asbestos, litharge, talcal are a few and while our processes

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are engineered to minimise exposure, it sometimes is necessary to require the wearing of personal protective equipment. I am sure Dr. Smith and M. P. de Valeis can assist in determining the necessity and recommending suitable protective devices. When the necessity is established there should be no question of "getting" them worn; they should be worn.

I'm not familiar with the method of respirator maintenance at Asbestos, but would recommend if it is not already being done that such be assigned individually. Two or more to a man to provide for the necessary cleaning of the equipment. Under this procedure, the man comes to regard the respirator as "his" piece of equipment and is likely to take more concern in its maintenance and use.

H. M. Jackson

HMJ:JLC

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