MEETING ON ASBESTOS USAGE IN CANADA

MARCH 3, 1975

SUMMARY

An informational meeting on asbestos was held March 3, 1975. In attendance were representatives from a number of companies using asbestos, the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association and officials from Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Health and Welfare Canada, Environment Canada, Energy, Mines and Resources and the National Research Council. Mr. J.W. Black, Director, Product Safety Branch, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, chaired the meeting. In his opening remarks, Mr. Black touched on public concern about the health hazards associated with asbestos. Consideration is being given to bringing in regulations under the Hazardous Products Act on asbestos and products containing asbestos. Because of the number and variety of uses of asbestos, the meeting was called to obtain more information on product applications. As no product oriented association of asbestos users exists in Canada, a number of individual manufacturers were invited to attend. Information was requested on the use of asbestos in Canada, with the meeting then being opened for discussion.

Specific information on the use of crocidolite in Canada was requested. It is all imported from South Africa, none being mined in Canada. Representatives of the Canadian Johns-Manville Company stated they use crocidolite in the manufacture of asbestos-cement pipe. Crocidolite was also used by Atlas Asbestos in the manufacture of fiberboard and by Garlock in the manufacture of gaskets, but neither company uses it now. No other current users of crocidolite were known to those in attendance at the meeting and it was their opinion that the Canadian Johns-Manville Company is the major Canadian user.

The asbestos-cement pipe manufactured by Johns-Manville is used in municipal water supplies as well as industrial and commercial applications. All crocidolite which they import is used solely in asbestos-cement pipe. Crocidolite is economically desirable for the manufacturing process in that it has better dewatering properties. It is possible to substitute a harsh grade of chrysotile to achieve the same effect, but according to Johns-Manville representatives, this is not economically feasible for their operation. The effect of a prohibition on crocidolite would mean they would be unable to make sewer pipe larger than 16 inches in diameter and pressure pipe larger than 12 to 14 inches in diameter. The asbestos-cement which they use in pipe manufacture contains 0.8% crocidolite. This is 8% of the total asbestos present. The crocidolite fibers are uniformly distributed throughout the wall of the pipe.

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Johns-Manville is not giving special attention to in-plant handling of crocidolite fiber but rather is putting the emphasis on better handling procedures regardless of the type of asbestos involved. Consideration would be given to the percentage of asbestos present in a given mixture with special care for processes where asbestos is the major component.

Regulations regarding crocidolite in other countries were discussed. It was thought that the "ban" on crocidolite in England was achieved by setting a much stricter limit for crocidolite in air than for other forms of asbestos under industrial health regulations. Several other countries have stricter regulations for crocidolite than for other types of asbestos, but details were not available. In response to a query about the effect of a 2 fiber/ml limit, representatives from Johns-Manville indicated that this limit could be reasonably and economically met in manufacturing operations but is was unlikely that it would be met in mining. Mr. G. Barge of Atlas Asbestos said such a limit is attainable but would be expensive to maintain. Atlas would not oppose such a limit.

The standard test method for asbestos in air measures only those fibers visible with a light microscope. No correlation was known between the concentrations measured using an optical microscope and the number of fibers measured using an electron microscope. There is a lack of knowledge in the area of health effects of electron microscope size fibers of asbestos, with nothing known about correlations involving concentrations of this sized fiber. Nothing is known about the efficiency of removal of electron microscope sized asbestos fibers from air by a baghouse.

Information on the characteristics of the powder produced when asbestos cement pipe is sawed was requested. If cut with a high speed saw, dust of a respirable size is produced. If the recommended tools are used, the release of fibers was said to be low. In the case of fiberboard, the recommended cutting method is chunking rather than sawing. The material is very hard and would require a special abrasive saw. It appears no cautionary wording is carried on the product.

The use of asbestos in joint cement used for dry wall construction was discussed. The cement contains approximately 5-10% asbestos. There are presently no warnings appearing on the package. The principal exposure to airborne asbestos fibers from dry wall cement would be to the workers during mixing of the dry powder with water and during sanding of the joint. Respirators which offer suitable protection are supposed to be available. Joint cements can be manufactured without asbestos, but the formulations tried have so far not performed as well.

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The question of asbestos in crack filling compounds was also raised. None of the manufacturers present make such a compound. It was thought that the compounds are generally cellulose based. The presence of asbestos in other cements sold in the dry state was questioned. Most insulation cements have been reformulated to be asbestos free. No specific examples were known of such products which do contain asbestos.

Information on the existence of any other consumer products which contain free asbestos fibers was requested. None of those present were aware of any specific examples. The use of asbestos in modelling clays was discussed. The manufacturers present are against it and do everything they can to discourage it when they hear of the practice. The source for asbestos used in modelling clays or sold in hobby shops was not known. It was thought it might be obtained from small users of asbestos who had purchased it for other purposes.

The possible release of asbestos from brake linings during use was questioned. It was indicated that the chrysotile fibers can be converted into forsterite, because of the heat generated during braking.

Information was requested on the use of amosite in Canada. It was indicated that it is used in the production of asbestos-cement pipe and fiberboard. Products containing amosite made by Atlas Asbestos contain approximately 2% amosite. This would be 12-14% of the total asbestos in those products. In the case of amosite containing products made by Johns-Manville, approximately 10% of the total asbestos present is amosite. None of the other companies represented use amosite. There are no known Canadian deposits, most of the amosite being imported from South Africa. Although the filtering rate for amosite is less than that of crocidolite, it is faster than chrysotile.

Another use of asbestos which was mentioned is in asphaltic paints such as used for undercoating cars.

The companies represented expressed a willingness to cooperate with the government departments and expressed a desire to be notified of any future developments on the subject.
