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METALS DIVISION

P. O. BOX 579 · 4625 ROYAL AVE., NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK

Date: July 18, 1978

Originating Dept.: "Calidria" Asbestos

Answering letter date:

Subject: Governmental Information Campaign on the Hazards of Asbestos Exposure

Sent to Caladria Field Representatives

You are all aware of HEW Secretary Califano's April 26, 1978 announcement of a governmental information campaign on the hazards of asbestos and the adverse press that it generated. The next step in this campaign is due to begin about mid-July and continue for a month. It consists mainly of highly emotional radio and TV spots that imply that anyone who has ever been exposed to asbestos is at risk and should immediately obtain a medical examination. This is obviously going to generate another wave of questions and some arbitrary, panic-based decisions. Unfortunately, about all we can do about it is give rational, objective answers to questions received and hope to ride out the storm without too much permanent damage.

The attached Briefing Package is intended to provide you with the information needed to field the questions. It may also be supplied to customers in response to inquiries on a selected basis. If you have any questions, please let me know.

H. B. Rhodes

Harrison B. Rhodes

HBR/rmm
Attachment

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BRIEFING PACKAGE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN ON THE HAZARDS OF ASBESTOS

SUMMARY

1. Substantial numbers of workers, particularly those in shipyards, have in the past been heavily exposed to asbestos. These exposures generally occurred many years ago before the hazards were realized and before regulations were enacted to minimize exposure to asbestos fibers.

2. There is a real and substantial health problem from these exposures which, due to the 20-30 years' lag time in the development of asbestos-related diseases, is just beginning to appear.

3. The risk of asbestos-related disease depends on the intensity of exposure and the potential for developing lung cancer is strongly enhanced by smoking. The severity of these historical exposures is not known and the estimate of 5-6 million potential deaths frequently cited is based on a series of assumptions of questionable scientific validity. We believe the number is grossly exaggerated but there is no good scientific basis to select or defend any other figure.

4. The government, after two years of heavy pressure by environmental groups and labor, has embarked on a campaign to inform physicians and workers about the hazards of asbestos exposure. The announcement of the campaign on April 26, 1978 by Secretary Califano stressed risks from past high exposures. The press coverage ignored this distinction and implied significant risk from any exposure. A copy of the announcement is included as Attachment I.

5. A key portion of the information campaign starts in mid-July and continues for about a month. It features extensive use of highly-emotional radio and TV spot announcements which continue to imply that any exposure to asbestos puts a worker at sufficient risk to require an immediate medical examination. Attempts by industry to have HEW modify the approach to a more objective, factual basis were unsuccessful.

6. The overall value of this campaign in the health protection of past workers is a very debatable issue. We believe, however, that there is no question that the manner in which the campaign is being presented is a calloused and irresponsible approach to a very sensitive human problem. Millions of past and present workers and their families who are not at any significant risk are being led to believe that they are likely to contract cancer.

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no scientific basis to speculate on a more correct estimate. The health risk arising from heavy asbestos exposures 20-30 years in the past is real and substantial ,but the extent is clearly undefined.

THE JULY INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

In his April 26, 1978 announcement Mr. Joseph Califano, Secretary of HEW, made the statement:

> "Scientific studies have demonstrated that asbestos creates an especially high risk of lung cancer and other serious lung disease for workers who have been heavily exposed to this toxic substance." (Emphasis added)

He went on to point out that these exposures generally occurred many years ago, i.e, before the hazard was recognized and before strict governmental regulations were imposed. Particular emphasis was directed towards possible high exposure to shipyard workers during World War II and of the synergistic effect of smoking in increasing risk. Because workers, especially those exposed during the war years, may just now be facing serious health effects, the Secretary announced a systematic government campaign "...to notify physicians, past workers and others at risk of the hazards associated with asbestos exposure."

A key portion of this campaign will start about mid-July and will run about four weeks. It features extensive radio and TV spot announcements backed up by an information card to be included with all Social Security checks sent out next month. The spots expound the following message:

> "Million of workers in parts of the construction, mining, shipbuilding and auto industries have been exposed to asbestos dust. Sometimes it takes 30 years or more for asbestos-related diseases like lung cancer to show."
>
> "The doctor told me asbestos dust can be very dangerous. So all you guys better go see your doctors too."
>
> "Even if you feel good, check with your doctor, stop smoking, and get prompt medical treatment for respiratory illness."

We believe that these spot announcements do not accurately reflect the spirit of Secretary Califano's statements and present a grossly misleading picture of the asbestos health risk. They do not recognize that the degree of risk depends on the intensity of exposure and give the impression