F1-020e(001)2cφ1

abra ASSOCIAÇÃO BRASILEIRA DO AMIANTO

Testimony

ABRA-Associacao Brasileira do Amianto
(Brazilian Asbestos Association)
Viviano Ferrantini - General Manager
Washington, D.C.

July 17, 1986

My name is Viviano Ferrantini, I am a civil engineer graduated from the Polytechnical School of the University of Sao Paulo - Brazil. I have much experience in working with asbestos, for more than 20 years in an asbestos-cement industry, and I am now managing the Association. I was vice president of the Brazilian Water-Work Association; president for several commissions for asbestos-cement standards, for the Brazilian Standards Association; a coordinator for my country in the TC-77 Group of the International Standards Organization (ISO). I represented Brazilian Industry on the recent International Labour Conference (ILO) that sponsored the convention on the "Safe Use of Asbestos" in Geneva, and I have been present on many seminars and conferences held in many countries over the asbestos-health problem.

I think this committee is a little bit surprised on receiving people of other countries and continents, some very far away, to speak at the EPA hearings. But this interest is justified for the great importance asbestos has in our country as I will show you later.

In the beginning of this year when EPA announced its plan to ban some asbestos products and phase out the fiber in a 10 year period, all the press in our country put off the news by saying - "USA finishes with asbestos" and this put in a short time panic in the public and in all those involved with the fiber. All government offices wanted to put up laws finishing with the use of asbestos, and we had a lot of trouble, and took some time to explain to all interested parties that the EPA had only put a proposal, that EPA had a direct interest on environmental problems, and other agencies like OSHA looked for the occupational hygiene and health issues. I put this point on to show how every move USA makes - by a government agency or department - as in this case, has a tremendous influence on us all, especially in Latin America. Coming out from a country that has a marked leadership and technical impositions, many times made obligatory by commercial ties, we all have fear that a measure like the one proposed would provoke similar actions by other Governments, because all questions that are related to the environment and health have a tendency to be brought up on the emotional side - and this is not the right way to deal with scientific and technical matters.

Yes, asbestos is important to us. We are an asbestos producing country, producing 200,000 tons of fibres, grade 4 to 6, each year. The greater part of it is used in our country mainly for asbestos-cement products, friction materials, gaskets, and many other industrial products. Mining and asbestos industry represents direct employment for more or less 25,000 workers, and a yearly production of goods in a value of 350 million US $ part of which is exported to many countries in the world like Japan, India, Arabic countries and Latin and Central America.

And why is asbestos important to us? Because it is a cheap raw material that can be used in a great variety of ways - and its products are essential for all developing countries especially in building materials as corrugated sheets of all sizes for roofs and partitions; of a/c pipes for the water mains and distribution, sewerage and irrigation; for low cost housing, warehouses and industrial buildings.

Let's go in detail on all these points:

a) A/C Pipes - The most close competitive product is plastic pipe for water distribution; it has the same price as A/C to the 4 inches diameter range (we considerate the full cost of a line installation); over this diameter A/C is much more cheaper: 4% in the 150mm or 6 inches diameter; 15% in the 8 inches; 20% in the 10 inch pipe, arriving to 24% in the 20 inch pipe. One knows this price difference can be critical for the implementation of water distribution networks. Brazil has a present population of 130,000,000 people with a population growing rate of 2.5% each year; that means 3,250,000 more children each year in our country - that should have to find when they come on Earth a decent home to live in, adequate water distribution facilities, an efficient sewerage system. But unfortunately not all find these things, with the result that more or less 10% die before they are one year old - that is 350.000 creatures each year. I will not say that other causes like malnutrition enter in this number - but adequate water distribution, and sanitary facilities would make things not so cruel. So when you have to spend one dollar in a public water system - you have to spend it well. The more you make out of it, the better it is for our society. That is why we need a good and a cheap product - and here we have our A/C pipes.

The same thing can be said for cheap sanitary solutions - we present in exhibit(1) an example - it is called a sanitary kit - a WC put up in asbestos-cement sheets for use in urban (shanty-towns) and rural areas. Photographs 2,3,4 and 5 show an example of this kind of application - it is a low price, of easy transport and installation. Another very important use of A/C pipes in our country is for irrigation uses. We have created a special Secretary for irrigation matters. Brazil is putting up an extraordinary program to transform dry lands in producing areas for cereals. Thousands of kilometers of A/C pipes - 5.290km in four years - will be used to bring water to all these lands.

In Brazil each house - small or big - has its water tanks. These are built from 50 to 1000 litres and are essential for having always a reserve of water to supply in days where the water pressure from the distribution network does not have sufficient strength to give the precious liquid to all homes - (exhibit 15). And what unique material can make these tanks? Only asbestos-cement that for its properties and low cost makes it possible to every owner to put one on his modest or rich house.

(b) A/C Roofs - For a country like ours - that needs to put in each year something like 1,000,000 new houses - for renewal and development, and has a 7,000,000 urban houses deficit - we have to think on cheap solutions. And A/C roofs and partitions are adequate for trying to solve all these problems. Once again I turn back to the best value one can get from a dollar - or a cruzado, how is called our currency - If one compares prices of built-up roofing in the Brazilian construction, one comes up with these results = (the index shown is for the complete roof of a house):

Type of Roof	Index of cost
Clay tile (Marseille roof)	100
A/C roof - with 4mm thick (sheet corrugated)	72
A/C roof - with 5mm sheet(corrugated)	79
A/C roof - with 6mm sheet(corrugated)	85
A/C roof - 6mm sheet (deep corrugated)	84

You see we can arrive to a 28% difference in cost in a roof. Multiply that by the millions of houses we have to build in the next years, and the figures will go high.

We have used A/C extensively in Brazil, from 1937 on when the first factory was built up in Sao Paulo - Photos(6) and (7) show what we don't want to have in Brazil, in contrast to photos(8) to (14) that indicate how A/C roofs can be used to solve our habitational deficit.

But our country does not think only on monetary views. We have been also taking actions on the asbestos-health problem. The official position of the Brazilian government on this issue, stated last June, at the ILO Conference was that we want a control on asbestos use, not its banning. It recognizes it is essentially an occupational problem and that education and training of workers is basic.

Brazil has not used asbestos in its more dangerous form - spraying. Our construction methods are different and our climate does not have the snow and ice of hard winters - so we never used asbestos for insulation in buildings.

Our TLV is now 4 fibers/cc - So you see we are where you were 10 years ago. Our association has considered this limit too high and has asked to the Federal authority a lower TLV - 2 f/cc where you were one month ago; that is now being studied by government. Few laboratories do the monitoring - by the membrane

filter method. Industry has offered the competent authority to maintain an adequate laboratory with its technicians to have the possibility of helping small enterprises to have their monitoring. By the more recent data I have received, in general terms, the situation of the only industrial asbestos mine - that produces 99% of the whole Brazilian chrysotile output - is now below 1 f/cc, with the exception of the packaging house, that as soon that will have its new equipment installed will also reach that limit. The great multinationals that have industrial plants working with asbestos in Brazil - and they represent more than the 80% of that fibre handled in our country, have put up in the last 8 years a control program for pollution, and today they are also under 1 f/cc. I would remind that we have a lot of work to do, especially in the small enterprise - but things are going fast, and I think well.

Our Special Secretary of the Environment has put a very stringent law on the labelling of asbestos products. Today every single product of asbestos must have the following notice - "Caution - This product contains asbestos. Do not inhale asbestos dust, for it is dangerous to your health. Smoking is particularly dangerous in these conditions". Instructions for consumers must be posted at the selling outlets. A special commission for the study of asbestos problems has been created; our association has a part on it. This is an official commission and dispositions are taken to implement measures for the control of asbestos and all the ways of working with it. An example is the booklet (exhibit 16) enclosed that is distributed by our association to all workers of the asbestos industry.

So as you have seen asbestos is essential for us and a considerable effort has been made to put it in controlled conditions. An U.S.A. ban would have an imprevisible, but certainly negative consequences on developing and Third World countries - with unforeseen economic and social implications especially in the lower classes that make the more numerous group of population in these countries.

To finish I remember here a sentence that was said by one of our presidents some years ago - "The worst pollution is misery; the worst pollution is poverty".

Let's think a bit over these words - I think they are very true on our context, and even world wide. Let's put our hands together to solve problems in a rational way, and not by turning them harder assuming a point of no return.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity I had to put my points in a sincere way in these hearings.