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Ministre
de l'Énergie, des Mines et des Ressources



CANADA
L'honorable The Honourable

Marcel Masse

Minister
of Energy, Mines and Resources

N6-002(001)

DEC 16 1988

The Honourable Lee M. Thomas
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, South West
Washington, D.C.
20460
U.S.A.

62036
N6-2(1)

Dear Mr. Thomas:

It was a pleasure to talk with you on December 14, 1988. Further to our conversation I would like to emphasize certain technical points pertinent to the asbestos debate. I also wish to reiterate that given the international reputation of the EPA, its decision on asbestos will have worldwide regulatory implications. Concern for its potential impact on regulations pertaining to asbestos cement pipe and other asbestos cement products has been expressed to you by numerous countries, including Switzerland, France, Belgium, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mexico, Greece and the Netherlands.

Asbestos cement products are important for shelter as well as water transport and sewage disposal. They benefit millions of people worldwide as they are safe, cost effective and technically uncomplicated. Moreover, such products account for approximately 75% of the world's consumption of this important mineral. Sound scientific evidence has demonstrated that because the fibres are firmly bound in the cement matrix, asbestos cement products are safe to use.

We do recognize however, that friction materials may be a source of possible asbestos exposure. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), however, has concluded that cost effective technology can be used to reduce exposure to asbestos dusts in brake shops thirty-fold and that this technology is readily available. Unfortunately, according to testimony at the cross-examination hearings, this crucial information has been disregarded by the EPA. I would like to be assured that in making your final rule that this and other internationally supported scientific evidence is considered and appropriately incorporated in your decision.

We are also concerned that the EPA rule may negatively impact on the ratification of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 1986 Convention on Safety in the Use of Asbestos. As you know, this Convention received unanimous support by 124 countries including the United States. This Convention comes into force as an international instrument on June 16, 1989. An EPA ban on asbestos products would undermine this important ILO initiative and ultimately jeopardize the progress achieved worldwide on ensuring that asbestos is properly used in a manner to obviate health and safety concerns.

In conclusion, I am hopeful that as you review the final text of the rule, you will give thoughtful consideration to the scientific evidence in support of the controlled-use approach to asbestos and to the cost-benefit implications of its ban. I am also hopeful that you will consider the international impact of an EPA rule on the international harmonization of health and safety regulations.

Finally, I believe that your careful consideration of the evidence and of associated issues will lead you to support the controlled-use approach, a regulatory direction for which I, the Government of Canada and many scientists of international reputation have so diligently worked to have understood and accepted. I wish you the very best in your future endeavours and I hope that we have the opportunity to meet again.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Marcel Masse', with a stylized, flowing script.

Marcel Masse

c.c.: Ambassador Gotlieb
Canadian Embassy