SUGGESTED SPEECH BY MR. CYRIL SMITH IN FORTHCOMING DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON

EEC DIRECTIVES ON ASBESTOS-CONTAINING MATERIALS

In my constituency in Rochdale we have TBA Industrial Products Ltd., part of the Turner & Newall organisation, which has the largest asbestos textile plant in the world and employs over 2,000 people in the production and marketing of asbestos-based products. TBA has been producing asbestos textiles at Rochdale for over 100 years. This Company exports over half of its output of asbestos-based products, the turnover of which runs in the order of £26M per annum.

~~TBA recognises~~ that if not handled correctly asbestos products can cause disease and the incidence of disease today relates primarily back to previous years when processes and dust control were far less effective than today. The concern with asbestos-related disease relates primarily to respirable dust which in other industries such as coal mining, ~~silica~~, sand, etc. can equally cause disease if not handled correctly. It is believed that by controlling asbestos dust levels as proposed by recent UK recommendations incorporated in the 1979 report of the Advisory Committee on Asbestos under the chairmanship of Mr. Bill Simpson and the proposed EEC draft directives that these diseases can be minimised possibly even eliminated in due course. TBA and the industry in general over recent years has expended considerable effort and resources on improving safety standards in their factories and in contributing to epidemiological studies in order to control and hopefully in due course eliminate such disease, which as I have stated previously, relates primarily to the dustier conditions of yesteryear.

Asbestos-based products are still very important today since asbestos fibres have unique properties because of their resistance to high temperature, abrasion, certain corrosive chemicals, liquids and gases. They are used in the form of textiles and often in conjunction with rubber, plastics and cement to fill many important arduous and high performance applications, including friction materials, seals, packings and jointings, protective clothing, insulation of fire resistant boards, building products and composites. There is no single substitute fibre that will fill the wide spectrum of current asbestos applications.

The industry supports the proposed directives in principle but

there are certain detailed amendments which have already been submitted for consideration (via the CBI) by the Health and Safety Executive with regard to the UK's official response. In supporting the proposed directives in principle there are certain features which the industry in the United Kingdom wishes to emphasise:-

(a) Crocidolite asbestos fibre (blue): whilst the industry supports the ACA's and EEC's preference for control rather than prohibition, the United Kingdom manufacturers have operated a voluntary ban since 1969 on the imports or processing of 'blue' based products because of the evidence todate that it is far more dangerous than white chrysotile fibre.

(b) The industry urges that an asbestos worker or person exposed to asbestos in the case of white chrysotile should be clearly defined for the proposed regulations to apply. Otherwise the regulations would be too all-embracing to include also people handling products containing asbestos with the fibres bonded or locked in. A suggested definition is "exposure to asbestos is experienced by those whose work involves regular contact with asbestos (eg. 30 mins. per day or 10 hours per week) such that their time-weighted average (TWA) for exposure is greater than 0.1 f/ml."

(c) With regard to substitutes, it is believed that we must proceed with caution. The problems associated with asbestos relate primarily to the inhalation of respirable fibrous dust now considered to be in the range less than 3 microns diameter and over 5 microns in length. Substitute materials containing respirable dust should be similarly regarded as potentially hazardous in the long run and be avoided. The selection of any substitute should be based on a balanced judgement of its cost effectiveness, technical performance and its potential safety. It would be tragic if our successors in 20 years or more were to be faced with similar health problems with substitutes introduced today.

(d) Harmonisation

The industry believes that a critical factor in the implementation of the proposed regulations concerns the urgent need to ensure harmonisation within member states of methodology of monitoring and counting fibres to agreed ISO standards to ensure uniformity

of implementation of safe ~~standards~~ methods of control. This has proved difficult todate within the United Kingdom but much progress has been made and consensus on methodologies must be established before the proposed legislation can be implemented otherwise there would be unfair advantages to the UKs competitors if they are not similarly complying to the proposed new regulations.

In similar vein imports of asbestos-containing products from countries which do not have similar safety legislation would create unfair competition to EEC producers so that such imports should be prohibited.

(e) Medical Examinations and Records (see Articles 14 & 15 of EEC):

The industry supports and is already implementing the proposed tighter emphasis on medical examinations for asbestos workers and on record keeping. The industry in particular welcomes the proposal to restrict smoking in asbestos areas. Anti-smoking campaigns would probably do more than any other single factor in reducing the incidence of asbestos-related lung cancers and should be encouraged.

The industry believes that asbestos products can be processed, handled and used with minimal risk in the context of the economic and technical performance of these products in their ultimate applications. The risks to the health of workers and other persons exposed to asbestos fibres should be minimised; standard techniques for monitoring asbestos dust in the atmosphere and procedures for medical surveillance should be agreed and established; workers and their representatives should have access to appropriate information about hazards related to working with asbestos fibres; it is absolutely essential that disparities in the approach of member states should be removed to ensure common procedures for dealing with working with asbestos fibres throughout the Community.

The UK asbestos industry has made important major progress in establishing safety for both its workers and its customers and end users. The industry supports the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Asbestos and in principle the proposed EEC directives. Harmonisation of methodologies within the member states is a critical factor in the ultimate passing of the proposed legislation.

T. S. Marks.

Re Cyril Smith

This is the draft I had in mind.
The parts underlined in red could I thk form the basis of a HoC presentation by CS although some amendments might be required.
Let me know if you think I can be of help.

[signature] 2/7/86