

Cover-up, conspiracy or collective errors in judgment?

Asbestos: Examining the Shipyard's Responsibility

- Why was asbestos used to such a great extent in U.S. shipbuilding without sufficient regard for long-term safety?
- Which organizations took responsibility for shipyard safety standards but didn't consider long-term safety?
- Which ones mis-identified the form of risk?
- Which ones attempted to fit their "model" for safe exposure limits to a situation they didn't understand?
- How did shipyards contribute to the development and continuation of these problems?

Now available, a distillation of over 500 archived documents that addresses this issue.

The use of asbestos products in U.S. shipbuilding was given far greater emphasis in the late 1930's than previously incurred as a consequence of the fire aboard the passenger vessel *Morrow Castle* off the coast of New Jersey in 1934, resulting in severe loss of life due to fire. Subsequent hearings in the U.S. Senate led to regulations requiring the fireproofing of passenger ships and other vessels. Asbestos-containing products became major components in ships thereafter, commencing with the passenger ship *S.S. Panama* in 1938. At that time, it was understood that too many airborne asbestos particles could be harmful to the shipyard workers, causing asbestosis; but by limiting the airborne concentrations below acceptable concentrations, continuous, daily exposure was thought to be acceptable. Over the next several decades, there continued to be the perception that there

was, in fact, some acceptable, continuous exposure concentrations which would not lead to asbestosis. It is now recognized that there is no safe, continuous exposure concentrations for airborne asbestos particles; nor is the sole concern asbestosis; rather, the primary concern is that of cancers. The persons who developed cancers due to their shipyard exposure to asbestos are the victims of a collective misunderstanding, since the 1930's, of (i) whether there was a safe, continuous exposure limit, (ii) what constituted the true asbestos-related concerns and (iii) the fundamental causes of asbestos-related diseases. The role and responsibility of U.S. shipyards in that collective misunderstanding is analyzed through an examination of historical documents.

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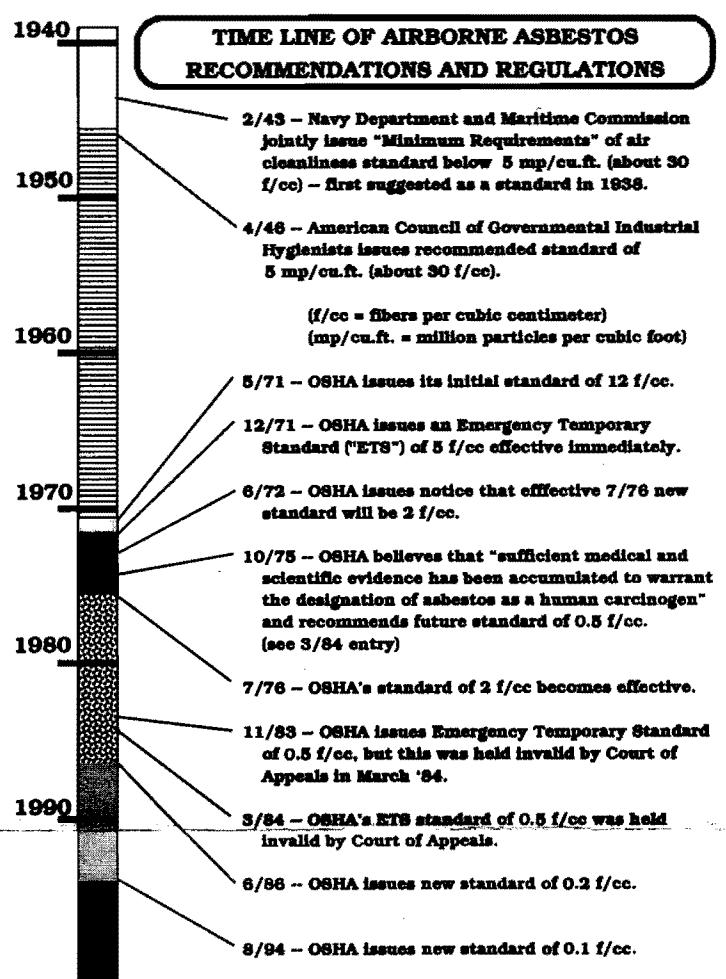
I. INTRODUCTION

- The Use of Asbestos
- Health Risk Avoidance
- The Industry's Responsibility
- The Shipyards' Responsibility
- Database for Analysis
- Ships Constructed
- Pathway to Shipyard Knowledge

II. ANALYSIS

- 1941 - Navy to Establish Industrial Hygiene Program
- 1941 - Federal, not State, Government to Control Industrial Hygiene
- 1943 - Navy and Maritime Commission Endorse Standards
- 1946 - Asbestos Pipe Covering - A "Relatively Safe Occupation"
- 1949 - Database for Preliminary Hypothesis of the Hazard of Low Level Exposures
- 1956 - Four Erroneous Conclusions from the ACGIH
- 1959 - Challenges to the 1955 Hypothesis of the Hazard of Low Level Exposures
- 1964 - Tentatively Validated Hypothesis of the Hazard of Low Level Exposures
- 1968 - Confirmation of the Hypothesis of the Hazard of Low Level Exposures
- 1968 - Applicability of Standards to Shipyard Work
- 1968 - Government View of Non-Traumatic Injuries at Shipyards
- 1968 - British Medical Journal Reports Shipyard Study
- 1969 - Tentative Identification of Other Asbestos Risks
- 1971 - Pipe covering Identified as More Hazardous
- 1971 - Asbestos Exposure Stds Revised to 12 f/cc
- 1971 - Emergency Standard for Exposure Further Revised to 5 f/cc
- 1972 - Smoking Identified as a Database Variant
- 1972 - Revised Standards for Asbestos Exposure
- 1972 - Thirty Years to Approach a Major Revision of Standards
- 1972 - Errors in the Database of Health Records
- 1972 - Indirect Exposure Found to be Hazardous
- 1973 - Longer-Term Studies Are Needed
- 1974 - The Slow Reactions of the Medical Profession and OSHA
- 1974 - TLV was a Fundamental Concept in Industrial Hygiene

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- 1975 - TLV Standards are Inappropriate
- 1975 - Navy Prohibits Future Use of Asbestos
- 1975 - OSHA Recognizes Asbestos as a Carcinogen
- 1978 - NIH Continues to Accept TLV Concept
- 1978 - NIH Acknowledges Government Role Since 1938
- 1981 - Continued Lack of Adequate Database
- 1981 - Slow Decision-Making Due To Inadequate Data
- 1983 - Requirements of the OSHA Act of 1970
- 1983 - Agencies Responsible for Establishing TLV's

III. SUMMARIZATION

- Historical Use of Asbestos in U.S. Shipbuilding
- Historical Permissible Exposure Levels
- The Role of the Medical Profession
- Explanation is Sought
- The Role of the Federal Government
- Summary Assessment
- Responsibility, Revisited

REFERENCES

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