

Doll - Asbestos

SPAID THE SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF ASBESTOSIS AND INDUSTRIAL DISEASES

(Registered Charity No. 276995)

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FROM THE SECRETARY

SPAID'S COMMENTS on

'Asbestos: Panic can stop, says top cancer expert' an article which appeared in the SUNDAY TIMES 21 APRIL 1985 page 4 and which quoted 'Asbestos: Effects on health of exposure to asbestos' by Sir Richard Doll and Julian Peto, a report published by the Health and Safety Executive and embargoed by them until 11.00 hours 24.4.85.

Who has been panicking? Could it be government or industry and its insurers who are alarmed that vast sums will be needed to make safe the asbestos used so carelessly in the past and to compensate the sick and bereaved? Certainly, those who seek SPAID's help, whether they are ill, bereaved or suddenly made aware that they are exposed to damaged asbestos, impress us with their fortitude and self control.

The Sunday Times quotes the Commercial Union's estimate that the total bill facing all insurers could amount to 150 billion dollars. This will be for compensation for death and disease. Surveying buildings for asbestos and making safe or removing and disposing safely of the millions of tons of asbestos already imported into the U.K. will also cost millions of pounds. About 2,025,829 tons were imported into the U.K. between 1968 and 1984.

The article may tempt government, local authorities, landlords and employers to minimise the risks of asbestos and refuse to make damaged asbestos safe. If so they will cause more asbestos deaths which will inevitably require increased expenditure on treatment, benefit to replace earnings lost because of illness, and compensation, either by the Department of Employment or insurers.

The article reports 'More than 400 Britons, mainly asbestos industry workers, die of illnesses induced by asbestos each year.' The Health & Safety Executive has reported more than 400 asbestos deaths for each year since 1975. The number increases steeply each year and for 1983, the figure is 645; for 1976 to 1983 inclusive, the total is 4285 while the Health & Safety Executive Mesothelioma Register records that only a very small proportion of the people who have died were 'asbestos industry workers.'

SPAID's records confirm this. More people are killed by using the products of the asbestos industry or by chance unsuspected exposure, than by working in a controlled factory environment such as Sir Richard has studied for many years. Statistics are attached.

Sir Richard knows of these people but has ignored them when preparing his report 'Asbestos: Effects on health of exposure to asbestos.'

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