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PRESS RELEASE



HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATE : ASBESTOS

The House of Commons debate, 22nd October 1981, took note of two proposed EEC Directives, one relating to restrictions on marketing and use, the other dealing with protection of the workers from risks due to exposure to asbestos, and welcomed the Government intention to seek agreement on a harmonised, practicable and enforceable policy to minimise risks to health from asbestos.

Recognition was given to the great efforts that have been made at dust repression at every stage of the manufacturing process, and improvement in monitoring techniques used. Credit was given to Industry for the effort it is making, and to the part played by the workforce representatives in constructive suggestions for changes in works practices to further reduce risk.

There was general acceptance of control rather than total prohibition when dealing with hazardous materials; but where the possibility of an effective control was in doubt, then a complete ban would be called for, and this has been shown in the demand for complete prohibition on the import and use of crocidolite (blue asbestos).

The unique properties of asbestos that originally led to its wide spread use has made it difficult to replace with suitable and cost effective substitutes, and more recent medical/scientific views have advised prudence with the recognition that some substitutes might eventually be shown to have similar risks to health.

The view was expressed that anti-smoking campaigns among employees would probably do more than any other single factor to reduce the incidence of asbestos related lung cancer.

An Opposition amendment, with the aim of seeking to eliminate the further use of asbestos in all its forms throughout the Community, was defeated by 113 votes to 52.

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