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"Asbestos", International Council of Shopping Centers (1)

Max S. Baucus

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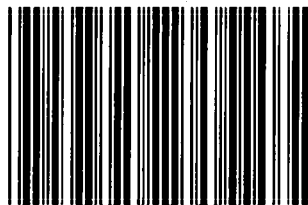
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(2) Subject* **Asbestos**

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BAUCUS

ASBESTOS SPEECH

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF SHOPPING CENTERS

THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME HERE TODAY.

MY HAZARDOUS WASTE SUBCOMMITTEE IS LOOKING AT THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH PROBLEMS CAUSED BY ASBESTOS. IT IS A SUBJECT AMERICANS HAVE BECOME FAMILIAR WITH OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS.

FOR ABOUT 30 YEARS -- STARTING IN THE 1940'S -- WE CONSTRUCTED BUILDINGS WITH MATERIALS THAT CONTAIN ASBESTOS. ASBESTOS, AS MOST OF US KNOW, IS A GENERIC TERM FOR A GROUP OF NATURALLY OCCURRING FIBROUS MATERIALS. BUILDERS FOUND IT VERY USEFUL. ASBESTOS IS GOOD FOR FIREPROOFING, INSULATION, SOUNDPROOFING, AND DECORATIVE PURPOSES.

WE'VE ALSO LEARNED THAT ASBESTOS IS NOT GOOD FOR HUMANS. IN THE 60'S AND 70'S WE LEARNED THAT ASBESTOS -- UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS -- POSED A SERIOUS HEALTH HAZARD TO THE PUBLIC. ASBESTOS WAS PROVEN TO BE A HUMAN CARCINOGEN.

w/ l/ H/12/88

MEDICAL STUDIES HAVE DEMONSTRATED A COR-
RELATION BETWEEN EXPOSURE AND A DEBILITATING LUNG
DISEASE CALLED ASBESTOS. ASBESTOS CAN ALSO LEAD
TO MESOTHELIOMA (MESS-O-THEE-LEE-O-MA), A FORM OF
CANCER THAT ATTACKS THE MEMBRANES WHICH LINE THE
CHEST AND ABDOMEN. THE DISEASE CAN ALSO CAUSE
LUNG CANCER.

LIKE ALL CARCINOGENS, NO SAFE THRESHOLD FOR
EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS IS KNOWN TO EXIST. WHAT
SCIENTISTS DO KNOW IS THAT ASBESTOS CAN SEPARATE
INTO MICROSCOPIC FIBERS WHICH ARE THEN INHALED,
DEPOSITED AND RETAINED DEEP IN THE AIRWAYS AND
LUNG TISSUE. THESE FIBERS, THROUGH SOME POORLY
UNDERSTOOD MECHANISM, LEAD TO DISEASE, AND IN MANY
CASES, ULTIMATELY DEATH.

BECAUSE THERE IS NO SAFE LEVEL OF EXPOSURE,
MOST SCIENTISTS AGREE THAT EXPOSURE SHOULD BE
MINIMIZED.

THE REAL ISSUE, THEN, ISN'T WHETHER BREATHING
ASBESTOS FIBERS IS SAFE. NO ONE THINKS IT IS. ~~THE~~ THE QUESTION
~~IS~~ ^{IS} ~~IS~~ WHETHER ASBESTOS FIBERS ARE BEING

RELEASED INTO THE AIR. AND FIND WAYS TO PREVENT IT.

THE PUBLIC BECAME ALARMED ~~WHEN~~ IN THE 60'S AND 70'S ^{WHEN} PEOPLE BEGAN DYING FROM EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS. THE FIRST FEDERAL RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC OUTCRY WAS ~~TO~~ TO PROTECT SCHOOL CHILDREN. SCIENTISTS LEARNED THAT YOUNG CHILDREN ARE PARTICULARLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF AIRBORNE ASBESTOS. SINCE MANY OF THE SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN THIS COUNTRY CONTAINED ASBESTOS THEY BECAME THE FIRST TARGET OF FEDERAL ACTION.

AND WHY NOT, SINCE OUR CHILDREN ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD TO YOU AND ME.

IN 1981 CONGRESS PASSED THE ASBESTOS SCHOOL HAZARD DETECTION AND CONTROL ACT. IT ESTABLISHED A PROGRAM TO ASSIST WITH THE INSPECTION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS FOR ASBESTOS CONTAINING MATERIALS. THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WAS CHARGED WITH ADMINISTERING THE PROGRAM, AND IN JANUARY 1981 ISSUED REGULATIONS WITH PROCEDURES

FOR TESTING THE LEVEL OF ASBESTOS FIBERS IN
SCHOOLS.

UNFORTUNATELY, ASBESTOS WAS NOT MADE ~~ASBESTOS~~
^A PRIORITY AT THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. DOE
TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE PROBLEM, BUT ~~DOE~~ DID LITTLE ABOUT IT,
~~INITIATIVE WAS TAKEN TO FIND SOLUTIONS~~

TO ITS CREDIT, THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
AGENCY FELT OTHERWISE. SO DID CONGRESS. AND AS A
RESULT OUR GOVERNMENT DOES HAVE A COMMITMENT TO DO
SOMETHING ABOUT ~~THE~~ ASBESTOS, ~~ASBESTOS~~

IN 1982, EPA PICKED UP THE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT'S LOAD, ~~DOE~~ UNDER AUTHORITY GRANTED TO
IT UNDER THE TOXIC SUBSTANCES CONTROL ACT, ^{EPA} RE-
QUIRED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO INSPECT FOR
"FRIABLE" ASBESTOS...THE KIND THAT CRUMBLES AND IS
THE MOST DANGEROUS TO YOUR LUNGS.

BUT WHILE EPA SHOULD BE APPLAUDED FOR TAKING SOME
~~SOME~~ ACTION, CONGRESS FELT THAT NOT ENOUGH WAS
BEING DONE. CITIZENS WERE CALLING AND WRITING
THEIR REPRESENTATIVES DEMANDING ACTION. THE WHITE
HOUSE INSISTED ON LEAVING THIS PROBLEM TO THE

STATES. THE PUBLIC, HOWEVER, CONTINUED TO PRES-
SURE CONGRESS TO DEAL WITH THE HEALTH THREAT.

CONGRESS DID ACT. IN 1984 IT PASSED THE
ASBESTOS SCHOOL HAZARD ABATEMENT ACT. THE LAW
TRANSFERRED THE PROBLEM FROM ^{THE DEPARTMENT OF} EDUCATION TO EPA AND
PROVIDED \$600 MILLION TO ESTABLISH AN INSPECTION
AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM.

I THINK WE ARE GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
BUT WE'VE LEARNED SOME LESSONS ALONG THE WAY.
FIRST, THE SYSTEM CAN'T YET HANDLE A MASSIVE
ASBESTOS INSPECTION AND MANAGEMENT EFFORT.

SCHOOLS SYSTEMS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAVE
SAID THEY ARE TRYING TO GET THEIR PLANS FOR
REMOVING ASBESTOS IN PLACE, BUT THAT A SHORTAGE OF
CERTIFIED INSPECTORS MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR MANY
SCHOOLS SYSTEMS TO MEET EPA'S DEADLINE, WHICH IS
JUNE OF NEXT YEAR. ^{MOREOVER THE SHORTAGE OF CERT. CONTRACTORS}
^{CAUSES EXORBITANTLY HIGH} INSPECTION AND ABATEMENT COSTS.
^{therefore}

I HAVE ^A INTRODUCED LEGISLATION GRANTING A ONE
YEAR EXTENSION FOR SCHOOLS TO INSPECT THEIR BUIL-
DINGS AND IMPLEMENT ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT PLANS.
THERE ISN'T UNIVERSAL AGREEMENT, HOWEVER, ON THIS

APPROACH TO THE CRUNCH. THERE ARE VERY STRONG FEELINGS OUT THERE THAT WHEN IT COMES TO ASBESTOS, THERE IS NO TIME TO LOOSE.

SOME COMPROMISE WILL BE ACHIEVED, BUT I THINK IT SHOWS THE INEVITABILITY OF CONTINUED FEDERAL ACTION TO PROTECT PEOPLE FROM ASBESTOS. THE CALL FOR ACTION IS LOUD AND STRONG, AND CONGRESS IS LISTENING.

AND THAT RAISES QUESTIONS FOR ALL OF YOU HERE TODAY. EPA HAS CONCLUDED THAT ASBESTOS DOES POSE A PUBLIC HEALTH THREAT IN COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS. AND CLEARLY THERE IS POLITICAL PRESSURE FOR MORE ACTION.

BUT I AM SENSITIVE TO YOUR CONCERNS, AND THE PROBLEMS WE FACE TOGETHER. FOR EXAMPLE, WE LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCE THAT WE CAN'T OVERLOAD THE SYSTEM. ANY ACTION TAKEN BY CONGRESS MUST NOT OVERLOAD THE CAPACITY FOR TRAINED INSPECTORS AND REMOVAL CONTRACTORS TO DO A PROPER JOB.

AND WE MUST NOT IGNORE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASBESTOS THAT IS LOCKED IN BUILDING MATERIALS, AND

DAMAGED MATERIALS THAT EASILY SPREADS ASBESTOS INTO THE AIR. IF THERE IS NO DANGER THAT ASBESTOS WILL BE RELEASED INTO THE AIR IT MAKES NO SENSE TO PRECIPITOUSLY RIP IT OUT.

ON THE OTHER HAND, CONGRESS WILL NOT ALLOW THE PUBLIC HEALTH TO BE ~~AT~~ AT RISK. WE KNOW THAT AS SOON AS ASBESTOS BECOMES AIRBORNE, EXPOSURES CAN BE QUITE HIGH. ONE DAY A BUILDING COULD BE SAFE, THE NEXT DAY IT COULD POSE A MAJOR HEALTH RISK.

THEREFORE, WHAT I SEE COMING DOWN THE ROAD IS A MIXED SOLUTION -- MONITORING STANDARDS COMBINED WITH MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR REMOVAL OF ASBESTOS THAT POSES A RISK TO PUBLIC HEALTH.

THE ESTIMATED COSTS TO REMOVE ASBESTOS FROM ALL COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS IS HUGE --- \$50 BILLION OR HIGHER. HOWEVER, THE HEALTH BENEFITS MAY BE GREATER. ~~IT'S TOO EARLY TO MAKE THAT JUDGEMENT.~~ YET WHEREVER WE COME OUT, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE.

I HAVE INTRODUCED LEGISLATION TO EXPAND ASBESTOS CONTROL
~~TO~~ TO FEDERAL BUILDINGS. IT SEEMS TO ME THE
NEXT LOGICAL MOVE, AFTER SCHOOLS, IS TO WORK ON FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS. SENATOR STAFFORD, WHO HAS
LONG BEEN A LEADER ON THIS ISSUE, HAS INTRODUCED
LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS THE ASBESTOS PROBLEM IN ALL
BUILDINGS.

LATER THIS SPRING I WILL HOLD A HEARING ON
THESE BILLS. THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US IS BOTH
SIMPLE, AND HARD. WE KNOW WE HAVE TO GET RID OF
ASBESTOS THAT CAN BE RELEASED INTO THE AIR. BUT
FIGURING OUT THE EXACT THREAT POSED BY ASBESTOS --
WHERE IT IS LOCATED, WHAT IS IT CONTAINED IN, HOW
TO REMOVE IT -- ~~THAT~~ ^{THAT} WILL BE HARD. WE MUST WORK
TOGETHER TO FIND A SOLUTION.

THE ADMINISTRATION IS OPPOSED TO ANY ACTION
AT THIS TIME, AND THE VARIOUS INTEREST GROUPS ARE
FAR APART ON THE ISSUE. I WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH
YOU -- AND ALL OTHER CONCERNED PARTIES -- TO
EXPLORE WAYS TO MANAGE THIS PROBLEM IN CONJUNCTION
WITH MORE DEFINITIVE STANDARDS.

I HOPE YOUR ORGANIZATION WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROCESS AND PARTICIPATE IN MY HEARINGS LATER THIS YEAR. I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT TO WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A SOLUTION THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE.

WE KNOW THAT ASBESTOS IS A PROBLEM. AND I ASSURE YOU THAT CONGRESS IS GOING TO CONTINUE TO ACT TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH. I LOOK TO YOU FOR SOLUTIONS. BUT DON'T DELAY. THE PUBLIC EXPECTS CONGRESS TO ACT -- AND THE POLITICAL WILL TO ACT IS THERE. IT IS IN INDUSTRY'S INTEREST TO PROVIDE GOVERNMENT WITH A WORKABLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM -- BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDES IT FOR YOU.

I AM READY TO LISTEN TO YOUR IDEAS. THAT IS WHAT MY HEARINGS ON ASBESTOS ARE ALL ABOUT. THAT'S WHY I'M HERE THIS MORNING. THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME, AND NOW, LET'S HEAR SOME OF YOUR QUESTIONS IN THIS, OR ANY OTHER ISSUE THAT'S ON YOUR MIND.