

REMARKS OF  
GOVERNOR THOMAS H. KEAN  
AT THE  
PRESS CONFERENCE  
TO RELEASE THE INTERIM REPORT OF THE ASBESTOS POLICY COMMITTEE  
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY  
OCTOBER 4, 1984

GOOD AFTERNOON.

AS YOU KNOW, THE ISSUE OF ASBESTOS, AND OF THE  
POTENTIAL EXPOSURE OF MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC TO  
ASBESTOS FIBERS, HAS BEEN OF GREAT CONCERN TO THIS  
ADMINISTRATION AND TO THE PUBLIC RECENTLY.

IN JANUARY OF THIS YEAR, I APPOINTED AN ASBESTOS POLICY  
COMMITTEE, COMPOSED OF REPRESENTATIVES OF SEVERAL KEY STATE  
AGENCIES, TO STUDY THIS ISSUE AND COME UP WITH A COORDINATED  
POLICY FOR ADDRESSING IT.

SPECIFICALLY, I CHARGED THE COMMITTEE WITH DEVELOPING A "RATIONAL, UNIFORM APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF ASBESTOS PROBLEMS IN THIS STATE."

I DID THIS BECAUSE IT IS CLEAR THAT A HAPHAZARD OR UNPLANNED APPROACH COULD RESULT IN A GREATER RISK TO PUBLIC HEALTH THAN NO ACTION AT ALL. WHAT IS CALLED FOR IS CAREFULLY PLANNED ACTION WHICH IS BASED UPON THE MOST UP-TO-DATE SCIENTIFIC DATA AND METHODOLOGY, AND WHICH EMPLOYS FULLY TRAINED PROFESSIONALS.

TODAY, I AM PLEASED TO RELEASE THE INTERIM REPORT OF THAT ASBESTOS POLICY COMMITTEE. AS YOU CAN SEE, THE INTERIM REPORT SETS FORTH A STRATEGY FOR SUCH ACTION.

THAT STRATEGY IS BUILT UPON A STANDARDIZED PROCEDURE -- OR "DECISION PROTOCOL" -- FOR TESTING BUILDINGS AND MATERIALS THAT MAY CONTAIN ASBESTOS, AND FOR MONITORING THE AIR FOR ASBESTOS FIBERS. THIS WILL REDUCE CONFUSION, SUBJECTIVITY BY INDIVIDUAL INSPECTORS, AND WILL HELP MAKE SURE THAT THE MOST APPROPRIATE SOLUTION TO AN ASBESTOS PROBLEM IS CHOSEN.

PART OF THAT STANDARDIZED PROCEDURE IS A NEW AND MUCH MORE STRICT STANDARD -- OR ACTION GUIDELINE -- FOR AIRBORNE ASBESTOS IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

THIS RECOMMENDED STANDARD WILL GIVE NEW JERSEY THE STRICTEST AIRBORNE ASBESTOS STANDARD IN THE COUNTRY. IT IS FAR STRICTER THAN THE CURRENT FEDERAL STANDARD FOR WORKPLACES -- ABOUT 660 TIMES STRICTER.

THIS NEW ACTION GUIDELINE IS BASED ON THE MOST RECENT SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION. THE DATA WE HAVE SHOWS THAT THIS LEVEL IS HIGHER THAN THE LEVEL USUALLY FOUND IN OUTDOOR AIR, OR IN MOST BUILDINGS -- EVEN THOSE CONTAINING UNDISTURBED ASBESTOS MATERIALS. IT IS HUNDREDS OF TIMES LOWER, HOWEVER, THAN THE LEVEL FOUND AT OCCUPATIONAL SETTINGS.

THIS DATA IS STILL INCOMPLETE, HOWEVER. SO THE REPORT RECOMMENDS THAT THIS STANDARD BE REVIEWED WITHIN ONE YEAR TO MAKE SURE THAT IT IS APPROPRIATE.

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IS DESIGNATED AS THE LEAD STATE AGENCY IN DEALING WITH ASBESTOS IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

IT WILL COORDINATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ALL OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS REPORT. IT WILL ESTABLISH STANDARDS FOR THE TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF ALL OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE ASBESTOS REMOVAL PROCESS: ASBESTOS REMOVERS AND CONTRACTORS, TESTING LABORATORIES, THOSE WHO TRAIN ASBESTOS REMOVERS, THOSE WHO MONITOR ASBESTOS REMOVAL PROJECTS, AND STATE INSPECTORS.

IN ADDITION, THE DEPARTMENT WILL EVALUATE ALL STATE BUILDINGS TO DETERMINE WHETHER ASBESTOS IS PRESENT AND WHETHER IT POSES A HEALTH RISK. ER

THE REPORT ALSO RECOMMENDS THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BE AVAILABLE TO INSPECT THOSE PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT REQUEST IT, AND TO RECOMMEND THE APPROPRIATE REMEDIAL ACTION. THE LOCAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR THEN WOULD DRAW UP A PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH'S RECOMMENDATION, AND THAT PLAN IN TURN WOULD HAVE TO BE APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT.

THE REPORT PROPOSES NEW UNIFORM GUIDELINES FOR ASBESTOS REMOVAL THAT WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARD IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF THE ASBESTOS REMOVAL WORK THAT IS PERFORMED IN THE STATE.

ALONG THOSE LINES, THE REPORT ENDORSES MY CONDITIONAL VETO OF ASSEMBLY BILL 1820. IN THAT CONDITIONAL VETO, I SUGGESTED THAT ASBESTOS REMOVAL WORK SHOULD BE DONE ONLY BY THOSE WHO ARE LICENSED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, AND THAT REGULATIONS SHOULD BE PROMULGATED IN A NUMBER OF AREAS: INCLUDING PROPER PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT, LICENSING, AND MONITORING.

THE REPORT PROPOSES THAT WE TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE ASBESTOS IN NEW JERSEY'S POTABLE WATER SUPPLY, AND IT STATES THAT ALL PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES IN NEW JERSEY SHOULD BE TESTED FOR ASBESTOS CONTENT.

FINALLY, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS INTERIM REPORT IS A MAJOR UPGRADING OF THE COURSE GIVEN TO ASBESTOS REMOVERS AND CONTRACTORS. THE REPORT PROPOSES THAT WE INCREASE THE COURSE LENGTH FROM 4 hours to 32 HOURS;

THAT WE REQUIRE ASBESTOS REMOVERS AND CONTRACTORS TO PASS A WRITTEN EXAM AT THE END OF THE COURSE, AND TO CARRY WITH THEM A CERTIFICATION CARD WHICH INDICATES THAT THEY HAVE DONE SO WHEN PERFORMING ASBESTOS WORK; AND A NUMBER OF OTHER IMPROVEMENTS THAT WILL GIVE THESE WORKERS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ASBESTOS AND THE MOST UP-TO-DATE TECHNIQUES FOR REDUCING THOSE RISKS.

I WANT TO QUOTE THE INTERIM REPORT ON THIS CRITICAL RECOMMENDATION: IT SAYS, "THIS IS A PARTICULAR CONCERN IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT AN IMPROPERLY PERFORMED ASBESTOS REMOVAL PROJECT OFTEN CREATES A FAR GREATER RISK OF EXPOSURE AND HEALTH HAZARD."

THAT IS A VERY IMPORTANT POINT THAT THE PUBLIC MUST UNDERSTAND. THE PRESENCE OF ASBESTOS IN A BUILDING IN AND OF ITSELF IS NOT A HEALTH HAZARD. IF THE CONDITION OF THE ASBESTOS IS DETERIORATING, OR IF IT IS IMPROPERLY REMOVED -- THEN A HAZARD MAY BE PRESENT. THAT IS WHY THE STANDARDS AND TRAINING THAT THE REPORT SUGGESTS ARE SO ESSENTIAL.

A MISGUIDED EFFORT TO REMOVE ASBESTOS COULD CREATE A MUCH GREATER DANGER THAN CURRENTLY EXISTS.

MOREOVER, THE REPORT STATES THAT THERE ARE NO DEFINITIVE DATA ON, AND NO DOCUMENTED CASES OF LUNG CANCER FROM, LOW-LEVEL NONOCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS.

THE STEPS WE ARE TAKING NOW ARE DESIGNED TO PROTECT AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF HEALTH EFFECTS FROM LOW-LEVEL EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS. AND I THINK THEY ARE PRUDENT STEPS.

I HAVE ASKED MY COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH, RICK GOLDSTEIN, TO HELP COMPLETE THE FINAL REPORT, AND TO ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGULATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IN MY VIEW, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE COHERENT AND SOUND STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH ASBESTOS TAKE EFFECT AS QUICKLY AS IS HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

BEFORE CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER A FEW COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS REPORT AS THEY RELATE TO THE RECENT CONTROVERSY ON ASBESTOS IN THE SCHOOLS.

THE REPORT RECOMMENDS THAT SCHOOLS BE CLOSED WHEN ASBESTOS REMOVAL WORK IS IN PROGRESS. THIS CONFIRMS MY BELIEF THAT EDUCATION COMMISSIONER COOPERMAN WAS WISE TO ADOPT THIS POLICY THIS FALL -- EVEN THOUGH CURRENT E.P.A. REGULATIONS DID NOT REQUIRE THAT SCHOOLS BE CLOSED. THE IMPORTANT POINT IS TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN AGAINST HEALTH RISK -- AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT COMMISSIONER COOPERMAN DID.

I WOULD ALSO NOTE IN THIS REGARD THAT EVEN WITH THE COMMISSIONER'S COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN, AND DESPITE THE CONTROVERSY THAT SURROUNDED THE ASBESTOS ISSUE, ONLY FIVE SCHOOLS IN THE ENTIRE STATE WERE DELAYED IN THEIR OPENING BECAUSE OF ASBESTOS REMOVAL. AND AMONG THOSE FIVE, THE LONGEST DELAY IN OPENING WAS 72 HOURS.

AS I SAID, ABOVE ALL, OUR CHILDREN SHOULD BE PROTECTED. AND I AM PROUD THAT THEY WERE PROTECTED IN NEW JERSEY TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE NATION.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT WILL HELP US ENSURE THAT ALL NEW JERSEYANS WILL BE PROTECTED AGAINST RISKS FROM EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

I LOOK FORWARD TO THE COMMITTEE'S FINAL REPORT, AND TO THE ADOPTION OF REGULATIONS WHICH WILL CONTINUE TO PLACE NEW JERSEY IN THE FOREFRONT OF PROTECTING ITS PEOPLE AGAINST RISKS TO PUBLIC HEALTH.

THANK YOU.