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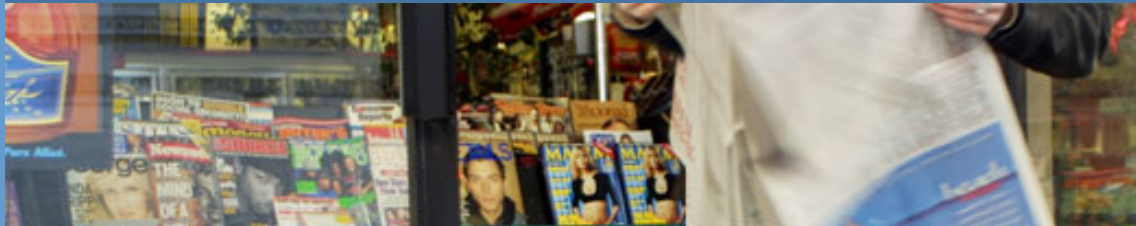
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

01/13/2003

Thursday, January 2, 2003

Asbestos warning should be issued

Every citizen should be outraged by the White House's reprehensible squelching of an official warning about home insulation products that contain a particularly dangerous form of asbestos. Congratulations to the Post-Dispatch for exposing this despicable action.

The White House Office of Management and Budget should be asked a simple question: What is more important -- protecting the health of American families, or enabling W.R. Grace Co.'s stonewalling about the hazards of its products?

As former EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus said, it is unconscionable for public servants to deliberately hush up information that affects the health of millions.

EPA Administrator Christine Whitman should go ahead, as she had planned last spring, and issue an official warning about the tainted insulation. If Whitman cares about the integrity of this nation's environmental and public health policies, and we believe she does, she should do what's best for America's families -- the OMB and W.R. Grace be damned.

If President George W. Bush cares about the integrity of this nation's environmental and public health policies, he will back up his EPA administrator and fire the OMB officials who stopped her from doing her job earlier this year.

Jim DiPeso
Policy Director
Republicans for Environmental Protection
Washington State Office
Kent, Wash.

Wednesday, January 1, 2003

Death from asbestos

Three years ago, I watched as my father slowly and, at times, painfully died from asbestos cancer. The companies that literally killed him were spun off from larger corporations and then

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left to go bankrupt, thereby protecting the interests of the corporate heads and the shareholders.

These companies contributed to his death. They knew the health dangers of asbestos years before they quit producing it.

Now we know the problem, but the administration of President George W. Bush hides information that could save millions of lives.

Why? The information runs counter to the interest of their primary supporters -- that is, those who can pay them enough in contributions to give them the "unvarnished truth."

The unvarnished truth is this: The Bush-Cheney administration once again demonstrates a contempt for any human life apart from those who can afford to buy their support with their political contributions.

Instead of referring to this administration by the Rovian moniker, "The Responsibility Administration," it would be better if it was honest and called itself "The Buying Your Way Out of Responsibility Administration."

Rev. Daniel R. Schulte, C.M.
St. Louis

Tuesday, December 31, 2002

GAGGING THE EPA: ASBESTOS

SOMETHING DANGEROUS may be up in your attic. But federal environmental officials aren't warning you about it because the White House won't let them.

What a rotten betrayal of trust.

The substance in question is Zonolite, an asbestos-laced insulation used widely until the past decade. Zonolite may be present in 60,000 St. Louis-area homes, offices and schools. Zonolite is fairly safe, as long as you don't disturb it. But stir it up and you've created a nasty, breathable toxin. Exposure to the particularly tiny asbestos fibers in Zonolite causes cancer. The stuff has already poisoned hundreds of people in Libby, Mont., where its base ingredient, vermiculite, was mined.

Most reasonable people would appreciate a warning if a trip to their attic is likely to expose them to a carcinogen. Last spring, the Environmental Protection Agency was getting ready to tell us. The EPA wanted to declare a public health emergency in Libby, clearing the way for removal of asbestos in the town and medical treatment for its victims. The move would have included notification to property owners elsewhere who may be exposed to Zonolite.

Then the White House Office of Management and Budget took the steam out of the EPA. At the White House's urging, the EPA canceled plans to declare an emergency and warn people elsewhere. It did, however, agree to clean the Zonolite out of Libby.

It's perfectly proper for the White House budget people to add their input when an EPA decision will cost the government money. But when the public's health is at stake, the health and environmental experts should have the final word.

It's not clear why the White House bean-counters put their foot down. They won't say. That silence is poor public policy as well. Could there have been some political string-pulling from an industry that is afraid of more asbestos lawsuits? Or, was this more of the Bush administration's see-no-evil approach to the environment? After all, these are the same folks who think we could do with a little arsenic in our drinking water and who yell "Timber!" when they visit a national forest.

Members of Congress should do some yelling of their own. They should demand to know why the White House is hushing up a health hazard. The EPA should shake off the bean-counters and educate the public on Zonolite.

Americans should be able to trust the government to warn us of danger. To know of a danger and remain silent is to betray our trust.

Bush backs industry on asbestos plan

When George W. Bush took office, most environmentalists were worried, and with good reason. Sunday's lead story brought this concern home.

The Environmental Protection Agency failed to tell millions of Americans that their homes are unsafe because of asbestos-contaminated insulation. Although the EPA wanted to warn Americans, Bush said no, giving in to industry lobbyists once again.

In the Homeland Security Bill, Bush let Eli Lilly off the hook for putting mercury in children's vaccinations. He initially opposed cutting arsenic levels in our drinking water. And, of course, the whole world is aware that he doesn't give a damn about global warming.

Obviously the health of Americans is not as important to him as the wallets of the big boys on Wall Street. Instead of worrying about incoming missiles, we need to worry about protecting ourselves from Bush and his cronies.

Cornelius P. Alwood
Ferguson

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