

Urea Formaldehyde Insulation Act

R. Viau of the Consumer and Corporate Affairs chemical directorate warned of problems and advised caution in its use. Reports of complaints from across Canada of nausea and irritation, etc., started to come in. Dr. Viau stated at that time that the government was aware of the dangers and aware of reports in Europe some ten years earlier which described the problem. He referred to a U.S. report entitled "Urea Formaldehyde Based Foam Insulation—An Assessment" done in 1977. By October 1979 a North Carolina lab test showed a link to cancer in rats at relatively low emission rates. What happens when it is in the walls, Mr. Speaker, is that gradually, due to moisture, the type of vapour barrier and depending on which wall faces sunlight, and so on, you get decomposition of the foam and release of the gas which at low emission rates has been shown, in mammals at least, to be linked to cancer.

In November, 1979, over two years ago, the "Marketplace" program raised the concerns to the Canadian public. That same month the state of Massachusetts banned the sale and use of the foam and moved to have the material removed from all public buildings.

In January, 1980 the final report on lab tests indicated a definite correlation with cancer in rats, and the Department of National Health and Welfare received the report but did not respond. In April, 1980, the province of Saskatchewan began an investigation into the problem. At the same time the Washington hearings on urea foam led to an investigation and a recommendation that a warning be included with each and every contract signed by the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission. In September, 1980, the present Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) indicated that a special committee would be formed to study the problem, 11 months after the first reports on the cancer link and two months after the first warning by Consumer and Corporate Affairs officials. On November 24, 1980, the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission's report indicated there was a cancer threat to humans. That particular problem, Mr. Speaker, and that particular report has yet to be addressed seriously either by the minister or by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet), or for that matter by the Conservative Party in this House. On December 17, health and welfare finally put a temporary ban in place on the foam.

In January, 1981, my colleague, the hon. member for Comox-Powell River (Mr. Skelly), responded with questions to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, as well as with letters, press releases, travelling across the country and appearing on "As it Happens" on BCTV and any other media outlet which would carry the story. Finally, on April 23, 1981, a permanent ban was put in place.

The Liberals and Conservatives want to go after the New Democrats in the House tonight for saying that for some reason they want to speak about the issue, that for some reason they have some questions which they have organized with the minister and they think, for some reason, that will be useful in dealing with householders or the media. Well, this issue has been before the House and any Canadian can refer to the

public record in *Hansard* and see what kind of questions the Conservatives have put forward and what kind of answers the minister has given. There has been abundant opportunity here, in committee and in public, for both sides to get their answers on the record.

The minister is saying that it is \$5,000 minimum, maybe there is going to be more, maybe some will come from the provinces or the municipalities, or maybe some money is just going to drop from somewhere, maybe from other federal programs. If you live in a small home and you have this foam in there and you have had to move out into the backyard and your children have nose irritations and you have emphysema from it and so on, you do not want Members of Parliament sitting here passing legislation which may not even apply to you at all. If you cannot borrow the \$5,000, if you cannot remortgage your home, if you cannot sell your home, you are in a position where you have to walk away. Certainly in a democracy such as this, where the government is complacently trying to pass a piece of legislation which does not address the problem, it would be completely appropriate for at least one group of Members of Parliament to stand up in this House and make it clear to Canadians that there is a proper approach to this problem. There has to be an approach which deals with the medical and scientific side, and one which deals with the complete safe removal of this material at the cost of all taxpayers. In the next election the voters can reflect upon the enormity of the government's bungling in getting involved in recommending and helping to pay for the installation of this dangerous product.

All physicians in this country, Mr. Speaker, should be notified of all of the problems with urea foam, and that has not been done. As I said earlier, there are still thousands if not tens of thousands of home owners, residents and renters who are unaware of the fact that the foam is in their walls and that part of the medical problem they are experiencing is directly related to that foam being there. All home owners should be formally notified that they have the material installed in their homes, whether they are owners or renters, as many are suffering without knowing the cause. The government should provide testing facilities in all regions of Canada with programs to provide some level of testing, programs that are set up to monitor it accurately in the medium and long term. This is because the release of the gas into the atmosphere of homes depends upon the amount of moisture in the walls, the temperature, the ventilation, and whether or not doors have been opened and closed a lot. There are a lot of variables and it requires some very accurate testing.

A committee must be established to determine an appropriate compensation mechanism to assist all those who have had the material installed and have a problem. The government's response to the questions in the House prior to April 23, following a great deal of urgency raised on this matter by the hon. member for Comox-Powell River, was to refer the matter to a special investigative committee. I think it is worth while for those home owners who are watching and who want to