

sible for its use in the homes of thousands and thousands of Canadians. What responsibility is the government prepared to accept for their financial and physical well-being?

• (1115)

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, I have indicated twice in answer to the very same question that the government, as a result of an interagency or interdepartmental study, temporarily imposed a ban on the use of urea formaldehyde as a material for insulation. We are awaiting the results of an in-depth report from the ministry of health. I understand that report is imminent. Quite frankly, until such time as we know what significance there is in the use of the material, I think that to jump ahead and answer hypothetical questions at this point is premature.

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, I am somewhat concerned that there are no provisions for testing. My supplementary question is this. In the United States it was agreed that the safety of the material would be proven before it was included in their fuel conservation program, which is similar to CHIP. Why does the Government of Canada do things backwards? Is this the reason that responsibility for CHIP is being taken away from the minister's department?

Mr. Cosgrove: Madam Speaker, I understand that the issue of the safety of the material is one which is difficult to determine, even for people who are professional and qualified to entertain an investigation of it. It has been a very difficult problem and is one which still rages. I understand that even in the United States there is opinion on both sides of the issue.

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, it may rage but it has not been included in their program.

Suppliers and installers are also suffering from the government's indecision. First, the government initiated the program without final installation standards. Then the government banned the product. As late as January 13, 1981, installers were writing government examinations on a product which they could not instal. Does the government not feel any responsibility for leading installers down the garden path and for throwing thousands of Canadians out of work?

Mr. Cosgrove: Madam Speaker, the hon. member by his last question raises the point that the implications of a ban are complicated. The impact upon those people who have used the material is a significant one, and so is the impact upon people who are engaged financially in the introduction of that material. However, I suppose the bottom line is, what is the responsibility of government generally when it is interfaced with the private sector? I would submit that the bottom line is that government cannot be the protector for all people engaged in all kinds of economic activities in this country.

Oral Questions

CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY ON TOXICOLOGY OF THERMAL INSULATION

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of National Health and Welfare, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Since the minister was the joint author of a statement on December 17 announcing the ban on the use of urea formaldehyde as an insulating material, is the minister aware of the study published in June, 1980 by the department of health entitled "Toxicology of Thermal Insulation"? The conclusions reached in that study on urea formaldehyde are exactly the same, word for word, as those reached six months later by the non-government expert committee on UFI, chaired by professor Campbell of the University of Ottawa, on which the government's decision to ban UFI was based.

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): No, Madam Speaker.

[English]

Mr. McGrath: Madam Speaker, I am surprised at the lack of interest and knowledge of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, who felt strongly enough about this in December to be the joint author of a press release banning use of urea formaldehyde. Perhaps he might be a little more concerned when I tell him that his seatmate, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, has urea formaldehyde installed in his home. He is one of the 60,000 Canadians so affected.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paproski: You had better check it out, Marc.

• (1120)

Mr. McGrath: Given the fact that the basis for the ban was supposedly the Campbell study, which is identical word for word with the study commissioned by the department six months earlier, why was the ban not implemented in June? Second, is the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs reaching for the silver bowl to absolve himself of all responsibility, or will he live up to his responsibility to the consumers of this country and institute a testing program in order to put at ease the minds of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians whose health could be affected by this material?

[Translation]

Mr. Ouellet: Madam Speaker, before I get worked up as the hon. member seems to be doing, I will wait for the conclusions of the inquiry commission established by my colleague the Minister of National Health and Welfare.