

Urea Formaldehyde Insulation Act

inadequacy of this legislation, is the hon. member prepared to vote against it?

Mr. Allmand: No, Mr. Speaker. At second reading I will not vote against it. In my speech I stated that I want to see this legislation sent to committee. I hope the committee will listen to the associations of victims as to how the legislation can be improved. I would like to know, as would opposition members, what the content of the regulations will be because the regulations will establish the criteria and the evidence required for assistance. After we have finished the committee hearings and the bill returns here for third reading, I will then make a further decision.

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, I feel honoured to participate in the debate this afternoon because we are dealing with an extremely important question which affects many families right across Canada. Large numbers of Canadian families are concerned and have very deep anxiety with respect to this question.

It would be interesting just to review briefly the history of urea formaldehyde foam insulation. Originally it was banned in Massachusetts in 1976, although it was approved in Canada as a safe product in 1977. The original Canadian approval was given in 1969. That was withdrawn in 1970. In 1977 the National Research Council stated in one of its public releases that urea formaldehyde was a problem. In 1977 the CMHC again endorsed it as a safe product, even though the NRC had recommended against its use in a prior report. Also in 1977 the Canadian Home Insulation Program began, and urea formaldehyde foam insulation was an approved insulation material. In August of 1978 Dr. Vian of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs stated that there were serious problems and complaints about urea formaldehyde foam insulation and advised against its use.

In 1979 the state of North Carolina documented proof of cancer in laboratory animals exposed to low emission rates of urea formaldehyde. In January of 1980 final and conclusive laboratory tests were done by the Department of National Health and Welfare, and those tests showed that urea formaldehyde was a possible source of cancer. In September of 1980 the present Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) formed a special committee. Two months later, in November of 1980, the Consumer Product Safety Commission in the United States issued a report on the threat of cancer. In December of 1980 there was a temporary ban in Canada imposed by the Department of National Health and Welfare, and in April, 1981, there was a permanent ban on urea formaldehyde foam.

It is interesting to note that as far back as 1969 concerns were expressed about the safety of this product, and yet we continued through most of the seventies to use it. In fact, it was used widely during that decade. The estimates vary. Government members say 80,000 families have been affected. Conservative members say close to 200,000 families have been affected. Our estimate is that close to 100,000 families have been affected. These are all estimates. Part of the problem is lack of information. We do not even know how many homes are affected.

As we look through the history of the seventies, we see a process whereby this material was approved, then not approved and then deemed to be a problem, and yet nothing was really done about it until the 1980s. There is a problem because, first, this material affects health. Its affects are difficult to pinpoint because they vary. They vary from house to house. They vary depending on climatic conditions. They affect various people living in a home in different ways. Some people are affected more than others. However, what is understood is that this material is not good for people in any dose. As I said, some people are affected more than others. In some homes more gas escapes from the walls and into the homes than in other homes. However, let me state very categorically, very simply and very plainly that any amount is not good. Therefore, we should make our objective the eventual removal of this foam from all homes.

We all recognize that that is easier said than done. Estimates for removing the substance from a home range between \$20,000 and \$30,000. That would make this a billion-dollar program right across the country. I think there is recognition that the price tag would be high and that the solution to the problem is not simple. However, the bill before us certainly is not the solution.

A government which has not acted with haste all at once acts with too much haste. We are dismayed that this bill is presented to us without the special advisory committee having reported to the government. What is the sense of having the advisory committee if it is not to advise as to what type of remedial action should be taken? Why is the government moving now when its own advisory committee has not even reported? We suggest that there is a bit of folly in that. We also suggest that the home owners who have organized themselves into various associations across Canada should be consulted. Is it not just plain common sense that people whose health of life is affected should be consulted? Unfortunately, the government has deemed it fit not to consult them.

• (1650)

As we look at the problem and realize the anger Canadian home owners feel toward the government and the companies that put the foam in their homes, we must ask who is ultimately responsible. Surely the government must accept a fair amount of responsibility. After all, it did a fair amount of testing and approved the product. The company which manufactured it was even indirectly owned by the government through the Canada Development Corporation. The government should accept a fair amount of responsibility, but instead it has played political games with Parliament and with the home owners across the country. If it were to deal realistically and honestly with the problem, it would meet with home owners in an honest, open and frank way. On all counts the government has failed, however.

Sometimes to the chagrin of some of my fellow members in this party, I have risen to question the testing procedures