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Committee of Supply -- Subcommittee B

Workers' Health, Safety and Compensation

Thursday, June 21, 1979

Chairman: Mrs. Fyfe

8 p.m.

Vice-Chairman: Mr. Fjordbotten

MME. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, would you like to introduce the staff you have. If you would like to give us a brief overview of your newly created department to give us some background, we would appreciate it.

MR. DIACHUK: Thank you, Mme. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

Without any hesitation, I would like to present the people who are officials of the occupational health and safety branch. Dr. Herb Buchwald, the assistant deputy minister and chief executive officer is on my immediate left. On my immediate right is Dr. Bob Fish, executive director. Next to Bob is John Wetherill, director of the radiation health branch; Keith Smith, director of research and education; Brian Thomas, director of administrative services; and Jack Lee, an oldtime resident of Alberta and known to many of you. He's the executive director of sight service.

The purpose of the program is the prevention of work-related accidents and ill health and the promotion of occupational health and safety. This is done through the co-ordinated delivery service from seven branches, whose primary roles are to work closely with employers, workers, and others in promoting, establishing, and maintaining health-safe working environments and work practices and health work force.

The division has just come through a three-year developmental period in which programs were brought together from several departments and agencies. The most recent addition is the mine safety branch, which was transferred from the RCB last year.

The strengthening of the program is very much in keeping with several priorities which I have already expressed in public on a number of occasions: a continuing focus on the traditional high-risk industries such as mining, construction, oil well drilling and servicing, and metal fabrication. This focus will be supplemented with activities directed towards education and greater involvement of workers in safety programs. Increasing attention to the identification and control of health hazards through investigation, research, education, and setting of appropriate standards because of the harmful and toxic substances that are used and radiation are examples of two such hazards. Safety in the rural and agricultural sectors: I'm particularly concerned about the continuing high accident rates in Alberta's farming community.

Extensive revisions are being made in the regulations now existing under The Occupational Health and Safety Act, and I believe some of you may have received representation on the voluminous amount of new regulations. These regulations were the first draft. They were issued after receiving briefs.

They consist of all the present regulations and the proposed regulations, all on single page. We think we have the industry, particularly the employers, appreciating that when it's printed in the form regulations usually are, it ends up pocket size. Now at the review level, we have some good co-operation between the different groups of industry and employers.

In research and planning, work is in progress on the development of a sound statistical data base which can be used to measure and predict the effectiveness of programs and point to the direction of future priorities. Part of this data base will be a system for co-ordinating occupational health and safety activities related to more than 50,000 worksites throughout the province. This will allow for the co-ordination and planning of activities with respect to individual worksites.

In this connection, I only want to say that the notification of accidents in accordance with Section 13 of the Act has presented some logistical problems which will be addressed during the coming year. As you can appreciate, the reports, the follow-ups are all coming in. We have some challenge, for the staff to be able to utilize them properly.

In the joint worksite and health safety committee program, it is especially relevant to this sector that we now have 139 worksite committees which are currently in operation. As I indicated, the majority of these were organized through a ministerial order. The establishment of these committees outside this legislative framework, in certain sectors such as firefighting and selected industries, is one of the challenges. Another is the establishment of committees in the construction industry by special arrangements. Initially we started off -- and we see we still have to develop them outside the legislative framework because of the influx of so many different trades on one particular worksite. There is difficulty in having an established joint worksite committee there.

The goal during the present fiscal year is to set up about 150 new committees along these lines. I did say in the Assembly in the last week that our goal is to establish about 100 by the year-end, but we're looking at as many as 150.

Some of the noteworthy highlights under the health and safety division: for each committee established, a minimum of five man-days is required from the staff of the division in the form of educational, inspection, advisory, and administrative services. It does take a fair amount of time, in some cases, to work out the rough edges between management and labor. The division will continue to endorse and promote the establishment of voluntary committees by collective agreement or otherwise at any worksite. In the investigation of accidents and complaints, the division will attempt to maintain the high level of service being provided to those concerned, the workers and the employers. Special attention is being given to providing prompt responses to requests for services and information. Additional clerical staff have been included in this budget estimate to assist in providing these services.

We have several programs in education. Some of you have seen the publicity on the Education Alive. Yesterday one of the members showed me a brochure received at a Rotary meeting. This is part of the program of education we are involved in, bringing the message to the community, to the place the job is. Our first phase was with the petroleum association, but it doesn't take long . . . Overnight they're able to change that trailer with the information from a petroleum setting to a construction setting or whatever it may be.

To move along to farm safety: the development of this program will be continued. It includes data collection on farm accidents and the provision of educational and advisory services to rural communities, farmers, and farm

workers. Training programs for farm workers will receive special attention. The program co-ordinates work undertaken jointly by the occupational health and safety division of the Department of Agriculture and is extended to more than 55,000 farm locations through the province. Mrs. Embury mentioned yesterday the film *The Sixth Sense*, one of the productions that was made to assist in the educational program.

Under health hazard evaluation: a sizeable increase in the estimates for the purchase of fixed assets relates to equipment required for the evaluation of health hazard. The laboratory has estimated \$70,000 for an X-ray diffraction spectrometer, which will enable it to identify and measure the harmful components in respirable dust associated with mines, quarries, construction foundries, and other dusty industries. This is at the lab at Beaver House. If any of you have read about it, in time you may wish to visit it.

The occupational hygiene branch has estimated \$50,000 for the purchase of field equipment such as personal samplers, gas measuring devices, flow meters, pumps, et cetera, which are necessary to identify and measure toxic substances and other harmful influences directly at the worksite. Compliance with regulations and standards, as well as determining the dangers and risks, cannot be accomplished without this equipment. About half the estimate is for the replacement of worn-out and obsolete equipment.

In conclusion, basically the work of the occupational health and safety division is to prevent work-related accidents and ill health and to promote occupational health and safety.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll begin with Vote 2, Occupational Health and Safety. We have a total of \$6,481,217 to be voted on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments before we ask for agreement? I think so.

MR. PURDY: I'd like to ask a question first, Mme. Chairman, to the minister. Regarding your comments where you said that the department was reaching 55,000 farmers: I'd like to know how this is being done. As a person who lives in a farming community, I haven't seen much advertising out there.

My second comment is that I hope you're not going to be thinking of making occupational health and safety on a farm compulsory.

MR. DIACHUK: ~~Mr. Purdy, the objective is to provide information, and the interest is great from the farming community. When we relate to 55,000 farm locations, that's about what we understand as the number of farm-related agribusiness locations in the province.~~

It would not be my desire to see it compulsory, because I know the rural life, the farmer, the background. They want to be quite independent, as was referred to in the debate the other day. They still believe the best way to handle a toxic substance is without gloves. The skin may be chewed away by the acid, but it will regrow. Gloves don't grow again.

MR. PURDY: I don't think that's a very kind remark to make about our farming community.

MR. DIACHUK: Dr. Buchwald?

DR. BUCHWALD: I think Keith Smith, who is responsible for that program, will probably relate somewhat more as to how it's conducted. No people are more aware than us as to the independence of the farming community, and our staff who relate to them are specially cognizant of that. Would you like to say a few words about that, Keith?

MR. SMITH: I'd be happy to.

The program is essentially a joint program, conducted by our division and the Department of Agriculture. So we do have the opportunity to use resources and delivery mechanisms within our own department and the Department of Agriculture.

In terms of some of the numbers involved, I might just indicate the last fiscal year's annual report numbers, to give you an idea of the scope within that program. One hundred and five farm safety workshops were held throughout the province. This accounted for approximately 2,600 attendees. These would cover farmers, farm workers, members of 4-H clubs, and farm families.

In addition to that, as part of our promotional and educational programs, we run farm safety displays at the majority of the farm fairs and exhibitions throughout the province, and they are under way at this time. Approximately 15,000 persons visited our displays, picked up our pamphlets, watched the films, and discussed concerns with our staff.

In addition to this, one of the key programs we have is in relation to accidents that occur to young children on farms. We've had a rather intensive program over the last year or two, trying to emphasize farm safety as it applies to farm children. Part of this has been through programs conducted with the assistance and co-operation of the school superintendents in a number of areas throughout the province. This has generated posters -- I have copies of them here which were part of the school programs -- and also coloring books, which are being distributed to schools, school children, and 4-H clubs throughout the province. We have distributed some 45,000 of these coloring books and magazines, which each have a safety message, together with some games and programs within the book, all of which are intended to increase awareness within the child population.

Whether these have been successful or not is always difficult to gauge, of course, but the responses from the schools have been very favorable. They have incorporated these programs within the context of their own educational programs. It's a sobering thought that in the two years previous to this campaign being undertaken, approximately one child per month died on farms in the province. Last year, five children died. Now, whether that's perhaps a reflection of our efforts is difficult to say.

That's the extent of the program. There is no mandatory aspect to it, of course. It's entirely a voluntary and educational program. This is the attempt we are trying to bring out.

MR. PURDY: Thank you.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Embury.

MRS. EMBURY: Thank you, Mme. Chairman.

Mr. Diachuk, I'd like to ask you three questions. I represent a riding that has a lot of oil field workers. Number one . . . I hope this will relate to a budget item. I suppose it would come under the manpower costs. I'm not sure about this, so you'll have to correct me.

I would like to know how many people are in the inspection branch in Calgary, and if their major function has been -- as I understand it, from having studied the Gale commission report recently -- to enforce The Occupational Health and Safety Act. When I say "enforce", I think that might be correct. Unfortunately, I have a constituent who sees it more or less as policing. So you can see it adds a different connotation to the term. I wonder if you could really assure me that the underlying philosophy of this department, instead of just being enforcing the Act, which must be done, would be one of being more of assistance to companies in the oil business and showing them how they can really improve their safety programs -- to be more helpful, instead of just policing.

DR. BUCHWALD: I'll begin the answer on that, and then leave some specific matters in regard to numbers to Mr. Lee.

We have very much modified the activities of the inspectors to be that of advisors and counsellors in addition to policemen. We recognize what was said in the Gale commission report. But we also face a sobering fact that out of approximately 20,000 inspections that are carried out in any one year, there are in the region of 6,000 compliance orders given; that is, our officers find that many violations of the regulations. About 10 per cent of those violations are situations where imminent danger might exist, and workers are continuing to work in those types of circumstances. When we're faced with a situation like that, it is necessary to take the part of the policeman. We can provide a lot of other statistical back-up to this.

In terms of the numbers, Jack, perhaps you can be specific.

MR. LEE: We have in the southern half of the province one oil field specialist in the inspection area. His job is mainly to go around to oil companies looking for infractions of regulations and also finding out what advice these people need. In addition to this, in the Calgary area we have 13 inspection staff. Not only do they do general inspections, but they help out in the inspection of oil field activities as well.

Anything we find, apart from the actual infractions of the regulations, where we feel educational programs are necessary to assist them, we pass on to the education branch, which gives us all the assistance necessary.

MRS. EMBURY: Thank you very much.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Does that answer the three questions you had?

MRS. EMBURY: Yes.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stromberg.

MR. STROMBERG: Thank you, Mme. Chairman.

I have to commend the minister and his department for the advertising now done on quite a number of radio stations relating to loss of hearing due to the farming occupation not wearing a shielding protection over their head. As a farmer, I think I'm quite obvious of loss of hearing, because prior to becoming involved in politics, about nine years ago, I was tested by your branch. I've lost 40 per cent of my hearing. I've also, in my occupation, lost the better part of my hand.

But, when we go into the areas -- and I realize it's federal legislation. But the American Congress has forced a number of the large companies -- Case,

International, et cetera -- to shield their tractors for noise. Do you have discussions with our federal counterparts as to whether we can bring in legislation that would say to the manufacturer of a machine coming in from perhaps West Germany or Tokyo and has excessive noise . . . The problem with some of the industrial machines now seems to be with electrical radiation. I see Ontario has become very concerned with the amount of electrical radiation emitted from some of the equipment coming into their plants. Have you looked into those two fields?

MME. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, do you want to refer that to your staff?

MR. DIACHUK: Dr. Buchwald?

DR. BUCHWALD: I'll attempt to answer that. We are making considerable progress in putting together national standards. A tremendous amount of equipment now used in industry is being standardized under the Canadian Standards Association. Many of our staff are members of the working committees of the Canadian Standards Association, putting together standards for equipment.

It's a slow process. The federal government, under its Hazardous Products Act under the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, does not yet have full legislative authority to deal with some of the types of equipment you've mentioned. Progress is being made; it's slow, but we're actively working with them.

Another recently set up organization, which will hopefully work towards these ends, is the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, which has just been established this year. I'm the province's representative on the council of governors of this organization.

So the answer is yes, we are working with the federal authorities to try to establish standards in these areas.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Stromberg, do you have another question?

MR. STROMBERG: A supplementary. I suppose what I was trying to find out is: is this radiation from electrical equipment a serious hazard? I'm speaking now of *The Miner's Voice*, the Steelworkers of America monthly magazine. The steelworkers are really getting . . . It's biased.

Is it as serious as some people are telling us?

MR. DIACHUK: John, do you want to answer that?

MR. WETHERILL: Yes, Mme. Chairman . . .

MME. CHAIRMAN: If it's not an answer you can handle easily tonight, you can always follow up on it later on.

MR. WETHERILL: I can usually make things up on the spur of the moment.

MME. CHAIRMAN: If you would prefer to follow it up later on, I'm sure Mr. Stromberg . . .

MR. WETHERILL: I think I can answer quite briefly.

First of all, I'd be very interested to know what machinery you're referring to. Nowadays it would seem almost anything emits radiation, if you're looking for it.

MR. STROMBERG: Yes.

MR. WETHERILL: If you're referring specifically to tractors or something with that kind of motor in it, I can answer that. Can you enlighten me?

MR. STROMBERG: I was referring to the debate in the Ontario Legislature about a year and a half ago. Industrial equipment -- not the microwave oven, no. Industrial equipment, especially in the computer field. Apparently these computers now have got to the power where there's quite an electrical field around them. Ontario is quite concerned about it.

MR. WETHERILL: A considerable survey was done by the National Radiological Protection Board in Britain, who addressed this particular problem. I happen to know the man who did the survey. He was in this province a short time ago. They exhaustively searched for radiation around the kind of thing you're speaking of and found nothing.

MR. STROMBERG: That's the answer I wanted to know.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hiebert.

MR. HIEBERT: Thank you, Mme. Chairman.

To the minister: you mentioned that you're drafting some regulations. I'd like to know if you're getting any feedback from employers or farmers which smacks on maybe too much government, too many regulations, Big Daddy looking over our shoulder kind of thing. I could compare it to something else that is in existence. It's like fire marshalls and their regulations. They impose some regulations that nearly get to the point of being self-fulfilling. Could you comment on any kind of reactions?

MR. DIACHUK: Mr. Hiebert, I've indicated this. We have on one hand the employers and management that would prefer to have no regulations; and on the other hand, the work force, the laborer, the trade union movement, that want everything regulated. Through sessions with representatives from both sectors and with department people, we are now proceeding and coming to a mutual agreement -- and I'll let Dr. Buchwald elaborate on it a bit -- to review and bring these regulations up to date. Really, what we're doing in most cases is reviewing our present regulations.

Dr. Buchwald, do you want to elaborate on it?

DR. BUCHWALD: Just a little.

I'm pleased you asked that question today, because it was just today at lunch time that I attended a meeting which put on the map a workshop which will take place next February which will involve representatives of employers and of the labor unions and ourselves to review thoroughly the drafts of the regulations we have put together, with the idea of coming to a constructive agreement where there is some consensus between the two parties as to what is needed. I'm very hopeful that we will reach a very workable agreement between all the parties concerned.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Did you have a supplementary?

MR. HIEBERT: It's another question. I'm wondering about various agencies coming under your particular jurisdiction. I know the Safety Council -- I think it's under the Attorney General's area. Could a council like this evolve to the point where it becomes a jurisdiction of this particular department?

DR. BUCHWALD: Mme. Chairman, there are a number of different types of councils. I'm just trying to find out . . .

MR. HIEBERT: The Alberta Safety Council.

DR. BUCHWALD: No, the Alberta Safety Council is not directly related to our organization. They do receive a grant from the government. They receive it from the Department of Transportation, as I understand it. They're independent and work along many lines, including rural, home, school, and child safety. It so happens that as one of my private activities, I'm on the board of directors of that organization. It has little relationship to our particular program, except that safety in the work place is naturally part of their concern.

MR. HIEBERT: There was some reference made to hearing. My last question is: what about rock bands?

MR. DIACHUK: Pardon me for laughing, Mr. Hiebert. I know that you and I both have the same difficulty. Our children can't hear us half the time because they're already going deaf.

MR. HIEBERT: It is a concern, though.

MR. DIACHUK: Which one of you gentlemen would answer that?

DR. BUCHWALD: We'll ask Dr. Fish to answer that.

MR. DIACHUK: He's the youngest.

DR. FISH: Mme. Chairman, I would have to admit I'm no longer a fan.

There has been a concern that the noise levels generated by rock bands can be a hazard to the people who work in taverns, such as waiters or bartenders, who are close enough to the noise that it is above the level permitted for industrial workers. We've made some efforts in the past to get them to tone down. I think that has been somewhat successful.

Probably something which has been more successful has been a general tendency to try to calm down the tavern life in general, which has been undertaken by a department other than our own. I think it has had a spin-off effect on reducing the noise levels the people working there are exposed to.

MR. HIEBERT: Thank you.

MR. VICE-CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Chichak.

MRS. CHICHAK: Thank you. I have several brief questions I would like to ask the minister.

How are the committees now functioning insofar as transmitting the educational aspect of safety to workers at various worksites, those that were designated, say, in the first year the branch became active and the designations were first made?

DR. BUCHWALD: Mme. Chairman, I'll attempt to respond to that.

I'll answer you quite honestly. With regard to the educational activities the worksite committees are supposed to be undertaking, these haven't been properly developed yet. I have recently asked our staff reviewing the worksite committees whether or not they are undertaking that function. The emphasis to begin with was to try to get the worksite committees to understand one of their primary roles, which was to determine the nature of the hazards on their worksite, and to solve some of the problems. It's time now that they were looking at educational activities.

Would you have any further information for that question, Jack?

MR. LEE: The only thing we have is that on the surface, without deep research, which you cannot do until you have a background history on these things, the majority of them appear to be operating quite satisfactorily. There has only been one or two which have really fallen by the wayside. In general, we're having good success, good co-operation with the committees, both from management and from labor. But I think it's a little early at this time to really evaluate how effective they have been.

MR. VICE-CHAIRMAN: Do you have another question?

MRS. CHICHAK: I have two other questions, but I want more clarification on this first one.

What I would like to understand a little more clearly is when the joint worksite committees were designated and the process of learning their objectives had taken place, was some outline or directive of an educational nature insofar as transmitting that to the workers at the sites put in place with these committees?

MR. LEE: Mme. Chairman, the education branch in conjunction with the inspection branch put on programs to teach the committees how to conduct their activities, how they should negotiate, what things they should look for, what their duties are, how they should record their activities, and what follow-up action they should take.

MRS. CHICHAK: Mme. Chairperson to the minister, is there any indication of any effect as far as a change in the accident rate at these worksites, or is it too early to determine that?

MR. DIACHUK: Mme. Chairman, this is really what we're now going through; we're trying to assess. The 144 worksite committees established were all chosen because of the results indicating there was a high accident rate in those locations. That is what we're trying to assess, to see if something working.

Of interest, though -- and I can reflect on Tuesday's debate, where the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview indicated that the joint worksite committee was necessary by a ministerial order where there was no organized trade-union movement -- the official advised me that one of the most glaring examples of the greatest reluctance was where there was an organized union. They did not

want to co-operate with our officials. So we have examples in both of these cases. Now the results of that type of worksite will be of interest to us.

Jack, anything you want to add on the results?

MR. LEE: This industry in particular just flatly refused to co-operate with the employers in forming a committee, and it has taken use since the designations took place last year until this time to persuade the members, the workers in the site, to co-operate and start a committee. If an employer is designated to start a committee and the employees fail to fulfil their part of it, there is no way you can put pressure on the employer to do it, because he can't compel his men to be members of the committee. Because the regulations say that the members of the committee shall be chosen by the affiliated union. So if the workers just flatly refuse to form a committee and co-operate, we're just at a stalemate until we can persuade them. We keep trying, and finally we have made it.

MME. CHAIRMAN: You have another question, then?

MRS. CHICHAK: I have two short questions, I think, Mme. Chairperson.

One on the Canadian Centre on Occupational Health and Safety: I wonder if the minister can bring us up to date as to at what stage of development that is, and whether we as a province are members of it. I think we are required to be in the membership. Have we been required to participate in any of the funding? How far has that progressed in its development?

DR. BUCHWALD: Mme. Chairman, there is no requirement at all on the province. They're not required to participate in any of the funding, nor was the province required to delegate a member. Nevertheless, the the government of province did see fit to delegate through order in council a member of the civil service, myself, to be the province's representative on the council of governors.

The Canadian centre is established. It is a fact the council of governors has met on two occasions. An executive board has been named. There has been a slight delay in further establishment, because of the recent elections. A couple of important decisions have to be made by Privy Council, namely on the location of the centre and, secondly, on the choice of a president. That still remains to be done. It will not be underway until that is done. But it's operational, and I think that within a year's time we should see some important results coming from it.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Is that your last one?

MRS. CHICHAK: No, I have the last one now. I'm sorry.

MME. CHAIRMAN: I'm not trying to hurry you or anything.

MRS. CHICHAK: My last one is probably a comment and a question combined.

I don't know if all of the members here are aware that we have what we call the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council, which is advisory to the minister, on which I was a member for three years and was doing some very significant work. The reason I wanted to mention that was there was some question about the review and development of regulations. That is one of the areas that the advisory council to some extent was working on in the past, reviewing the regulations that the division felt it would like to have

developed and passed. These were submitted to the council to examine and then to make recommendations to the minister.

Perhaps if members have some concerns with respect to the development of some of the regulations, or the absence of them, that is an area where one can express some concerns for their attention. I'm not sure, Mr. Minister, whether you now have them reviewing any of the proposed regulations or considering putting forward proposals with regard to regulations, but that's an area that can be addressed.

MR. DIACHUK: Thank you. Mme. Chairman, Mrs. Chichak has very appropriately raised that, because we do have three vacancies on the council. I expect an opportunity to have an order in council approved to appoint the three members. And with that full complement, I believe that the council will be able to (inaudible). But they have been involved. Would you like to elaborate on the council's work, Dr. Buchwald?

DR. BUCHWALD: At its most recent meeting, the council chose to leave the review of the regulations until the drafts are further developed. Mr. Diachuk mentioned that considerable review is going on between industry and labor at the present time. And when you see the volumes of regulations, the council backed off a little bit and said that they won't get involved at this stage, until they're somewhat more refined. They would like to have the opportunity of reviewing them before they eventually come to Executive Council.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Wolstenholme.

MR. WOLSTENHOLME: Thank you. This purchase of fixed assets is up considerably. Is that because of a new department? It's on page 171 -- almost \$220,000. Is that for furniture and so on for the new offices, or is it for test equipment?

MR. DIACHUK: Yes, I did recap it a bit, but the fixed assets included are what I've referred into the X-ray equipment that was brought in. Brian, would you like to give Mr. Wolstenholme a better recap of the 130 per cent increase?

MR. THOMAS: Okay, Mme. Chairperson. There is approximately \$60,000 to \$70,000 for X-ray defraction in the laboratory services branch; approximately 30-some-odd thousand dollars in the occupational hygiene branch -- approximately half of that is to replace existing worn-out testing equipment, and the other half is to set up the Calgary office, which was opened just this last fiscal year. We have people in the occupational hygiene branch in Calgary now. There is another large sum in the medical services branch for the mobile unit testing facility that has an X-ray unit, an audiology booth, and things like that in it, that can go out to industry and test workers at the site. Those three areas make up the major portion of the increase in fixed assets.

MR. WOLSTENHOLME: So it's almost all testing equipment.

MR. THOMAS: Yes.

MR. WOLSTENHOLME: Thank you.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Before we wrap this vote up, you have one more question, Mr. Stromberg?

MR. STROMBERG: I have a couple; I'll try to make them short, Mme. Chairwoman. With the amount of thermal power being produced now and going to be produced, and hearings by the ERCB on transmission lines, and certain statements made from other countries and other provinces and by some of the intervenors that living under major transmission lines is a health hazard, I would like to ask the minister, Bill, if your department has taken a look at if there is a health hazard living under a major hydro line, and are you intervening with your findings, your recommendations, or your wisdom in the ERCB hearings?

MR. DIACHUK: I'm going to call on Dr. Buchwald to answer that question.

DR. BUCHWALD: Yes indeed, Mme. Chairman, we have been involved with the hearings at the request of the Department of Environment. Mr. John Wetherill, who is here with us this evening, has in fact made a study of that particular problem. I'll let him answer the question directly.

MME. CHAIRMAN: I wonder if that's of general interest to the committee, or if we could follow that up after the meeting.

MR. STROMBERG: It's quite a problem to those farmers who are going to have to live under those power lines.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Is the rest of the committee interested in hearing the answer now, or would you like to have this followed up?

MR. PURDY: Well, I don't know; I've lived under a 240 kV line for 18 years, and I think I'm normal.

MR. STROMBERG: Mme. Chairman, I lived under one, and I lost my teeth.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Would you mind following that up after the meeting, Mr. Stromberg? Okay, you have a second question that you wish to ask?

MR. STROMBERG: Yes, back about seven or eight years ago there was considerable controversy in southern Alberta as to the amount of sulphur that was coming out of gas processing plants, especially in Pincher Creek. Your department was involved in considerable testing. Was this a hazard to health?

MME. CHAIRMAN: I think that is a specific concern too. Would you mind . . .

MR. STROMBERG: I was just wondering if they were involved in that.

MR. DIACHUK: Mme. Chairman, that's under Environment. You've got the wrong department for that, Mr. Stromberg.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Okay, are we agreed on Vote 2, \$6,481,217?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Vote 3, Workers' Compensation, the amount to be voted on is \$10,039,200.

MR. VICE-CHAIRMAN: Andy Little had a question.

MR. LITTLE: Yes, to the minister. I'm very interested in the pension structure of Workers' Compensation. Could you tell me how you arrive at pensions? What are minimums, what are maximums?

MR. DIACHUK: Bill 13 outlines the current increase, Mr. Little. It now increases . . .

MR. LITTLE: I didn't ask about increases. I asked what your formula is, how you arrived at a pension.

MR. DIACHUK: Well, this was taken as an average salary of that current year. From '74 to now in '79, our maximum earning that the pension is based on has increased from something like \$10,000 to \$18,250 now. It's based on that figure. I appreciate the fact that there are workers who will earn more than that amount, but this is a practice that all boards take. They have a maximum that they will pay on any pension. In Alberta we use a figure of taking 75 per cent of that amount, because it's not taxable. The question facing us is an approach Saskatchewan has taken, with their new legislation this year. I sincerely look forward to the representations made during the select committee hearings, whether that is an approach we should look at in Alberta. In Saskatchewan they have taken the approach to give a lump-sum award.

MR. LITTLE: You're getting away from my question. I asked you how you computed a maximum pension. What's your formula? A man is injured, so he can't carry on employment. How do you compute his pension?

MR. DIACHUK: The maximum pension payable effective July 1, 1979, would be 75 per cent of \$18,250. Your question no doubt is: where did you arrive at that figure? This was arrived at by taking an average salary in '74, that we have used as a base year. Because that is when we started to increase pensions. Prior to that, pensions did not get an increase at all. It's only in the last five years that pensions have been increased. The argument is, is \$18,250 an average salary? We used it by increasing '78 salary by about 10.5 per cent. And it has only been increased in the last five years, Mr. Little, in percentages.

MR. LITTLE: Well let me get this straight, then. If a man is totally unable to carry on further employment, he would get 75 per cent of \$18,000.

MR. DIACHUK: \$250, if he's earning that amount or more. If not, he gets it at what he's earning at his job at that time.

MR. LITTLE: Oh, well good. That's what I asked you asked you in the first instance.

MR. DIACHUK: It could be less, not more; less than \$18,250.

MR. LITTLE: So it's 75 per cent of his salary, that he was earning. Okay, then, do you have a minimum salary?

MR. DIACHUK: The minimum is whatever the man is earning less than \$18,250.

MR. LITTLE: You don't have a base?

MR. DIACHUK: No, there's no minimum, no bottom.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Okay, can we agree on this vote? No? Sorry, I didn't see you indicate. Go ahead.

MR. STROMBERG: I've been waving.

Your department, Mr. Minister, had done a very good job in advertising that the most hazardous occupation is farming. But you have ignored the question, should we bring farm labor under Workers' Compensation?

MR. DIACHUK: Mme. Chairman, the agricultural sector has been offered an opportunity to participate in it since about 1976, if I'm not mistaken, after the '75 report.

MR. STROMBERG: But other industries are forced to take it in.

MR. DIACHUK: They're not forced; they are excluded. Right now we exclude a sector or a group of industries, and a good example is . . .

MR. STROMBERG: Piano tuners.

MR. DIACHUK: . . . the piano tuners, okay, or real-estate agents, or jewellers. They're excluded if they request it. And then they don't have to belong. So we have a reverse approach now, since '76, by excluding industries or sectors.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. STROMBERG: Mme. Chairwoman, I believe we discussed considerably here about a year or two ago quite a number of recommendations that Mr. Crawford brought in, of piano tuners, and secretaries, et cetera. But when you have the most dangerous occupation in Alberta, and you choose to ignore it . . .

MME. CHAIRMAN: I think the minister answered that; he didn't say that they were precluded, that it had been offered.

MR. DIACHUK: They're not excluded.

MR. STROMBERG: Okay. But other industries are brought into it.

MR. APPLEBY: Could I make a comment supplementary to that one? I wonder if the the Member for Camrose is trying to indicate that the government should make Workers' Compensation compulsory for farmers. Is this what you're trying to indicate?

MR. STROMBERG: Well, if we're treating other industries such that it has to be compulsory, all I asked was, has the department really addressed itself to this problem?

MR. APPLEBY: No, but I just wonder, is that what you're working on?

MR. VICE-CHAIRMAN: With all due respect, I think they have stated their position quite clearly on where they stand with farmers.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Okay, anything further then? You had one futher, did you?

MR. STROMBERG: I was curious as to whether research has been done on asbestos, the problems with the asbestos industry. We have quite a number of asbestos workers.

MR. VICE-CHAIRMAN: I think this is getting into specifics again.

MR. DIACHUK: We'll just give him a short answer here, Mme. Chairman. Go ahead, Bob.

DR. FISH: Mme. Chairman, about a year ago we commissioned and had done a study by a Calgary physician, Dr. Kaegi, who assessed the degree to which asbestos is a hazard in Alberta. She looked at the uses to which it was put, the number of workers who were exposed to it, and she made some recommendations on what should be done to bring that hazard under better control. Part of her conclusions were that we have very good control of that hazard now by the gradual reduction of the usage of asbestos, and the substitution of less hazardous materials. The other part of her recommendations was a comprehensive medical surveillance program should be available for workers exposed to asbestos, and we are embodying most of her recommendations in the draft asbestos regulations which are now being circulated publicly for assessment.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Okay, would you refer to the vote. Are we in agreement?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for bringing your staff. If you wish to follow up those specifics, Mr. Stromberg.

MR. STROMBERG: Well, I would just like to make a complaint. I think I've been misled here. I can remember going into an election eight years ago, when the Premier of this province said, why should the farmers at Pincher Creek have to go to court to prove that they and their cows are being poisoned? At that time your department really undertook some very in-depth studies as to blood tests -- you were doing everything out there, going back to Environment. This is all costing us money. If we're going to go into occupational health, sulphur poisoning is part of it.

MR. DIACHUK: Dr. Buchwald has an answer for you on that, if that's what you're looking for.

MR. STROMBERG: I was wondering, are you still in that area? I'm really concerned because we have gas-processing plants in our area. Mme. Chairwoman, I was just a little disappointed, I was quite off on that, because I thought that was a part of occupational health and safety, because they had done so much work on it eight years ago.

MME. CHAIRMAN: I think it is, and we didn't mean to insinuate it wasn't. It's just that I think there were other members who weren't specifically interested in it. And we wondered if you could follow it up on an individual basis.

There is an answer for you, and the assistant deputy minister is prepared to speak to you.

MR. STROMBERG: Well, yes, we can answer the question in the Legislature.

MR. DIACHUK: No, no, we can do it after the meeting is adjourned, if you want to -- the specifics. But the area is Environment. You are referring to some specifics, yes. Dr. Buchwald has the answer for you.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Well, go ahead.

DR. BUCHWALD: Mme. Chairman, it will be quite quick, because it was a rather interesting and unusual case. In 1969 we were involved in Pincher Creek, when there was a question of possible lead poisoning. It wasn't sulphur, it was lead at that time.

MR. STROMBERG: From the sulphur?

DR. BUCHWALD: Not from the sulphur, no. One individual from that community was diagnosed as supposedly having lead poisoning. Industrial health services, which is now part of our division, was previously in the Department of Health. They became involved, because they were part of the Department of Health. We had all the facilities in the department for properly analysing for lead in body fluids, urine and blood, and for analysing a variety of samples for lead. Eventually, when we carried out these analyses -- at great expense, I might say; several thousands of dollars were involved -- it turned out there was no lead there. There was no lead at all to be found. Later on we learned that the diagnosis of lead poisoning was incorrect. The individual had another disease, which was misdiagnosed as lead poisoning.

So we didn't have any mandatory involvement there. We helped because our laboratory had the capability of analysing accurately for the particular contaminant in question.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Okay? The meeting is adjourned.

MR. DIACHUK: I overlooked introducing my secretary, Jenny Malanchuk, who has been taking notes.

MME. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.