April 30, 1985

STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

My name is Peter Smith and I am President of the Fire Fighters Association of New Jersey, AFL-CIO. Senator Dalton, on behalf of the Fire Fighters we commend you for working so hard to put together this new "Community Right to Know and Chemical Safety Act". You have demonstrated your interest in the health and safety of Fire Fighters.

There are two points that I want to bring to your attention, the first one is the inclusion of labeling in the draft. Universal Labeling is most important to the fire service. To be able to pre-fire plan any industrial facility and to be able to do it right, a firefighter must know what is in the building and is the material toxic or hazardous and how does it react with water, our primary extinguishing agent.

Using the information provided on the Emergency Services Information Survey and the Hazardous Material Data Sheets the firefighters or inspector can quickly match the label to the information in his possession and determine the hazard, what extinguishing should be used, whether SCBA's should be used, first aid procedures, the level of toxicity etc. With the limited numbers of inspectors available and budget cuts that have taken place, inspectors available time would be increased because the inspector would not have to be pouring over chemical books to ascertain pertinent information needed to properly pre-fire plan an industrial facility or any other structure that contains hazardous material.

For the fire ground operation the Emergency Services Information Survey and Hazardous Material Fact Sheets would be available at a command post that would be set up. The fire officer in charge would then have all the necessary information at his fingertips to assist in making the proper judgements for extinguishment, safety of firefighters and evacuation if necessary.
We would like to see the Chemical Abstracts Service Number on both the E.S.I.S. and as it is now on the H.M.D.S. We are also working with the Department of Health to give more emphasis to emergency response on the H.M.D.S. and I do believe they will cooperate and that additional legislation will not be necessary.

The second point I raise is the SIC codes covering schools except for vocational being exempted in the new draft. Our association is opposed to any such exemption and I will give you and the committee documentation to support our opposition. I have been in communication with a consultant who has surveyed forty two school systems to date. They have discovered many toxic and dangerous materials in the systems they have surveyed to date. I am attaching their report.

To sum up the "Community Right to Know and Chemical Safety Act" is an extremely important piece of legislation for the fire service and the residents of our state and we respectfully request your vote to release this legislation from committee with the suggestions that I propose, as well as, amendments suggested by the Right to Know Coalition.
To date, 42 systems have been surveyed and 374 substances on Work Place Hazardous Substances List have been found. When Safety Data Sheets are received from manufacturers of mixtures (paints, custodial supplies, etc.), we expect the number of substances to top 400.

It is not unusual for a single high school to have over 100 of these substances, it is rather common. Some schools have over 160.

Probably better than 50% of the substances are special health hazards and many are known and potent carcinogens, mutagens and teratogens. A few examples:

Benzene; Asbestos; Arsenic; Carbon Tetrachloride; Hydrazine; Lead; Lead Nitrate; Sodium Arsenate; etc.

Our analysis will be available in a few days.

One of the systems first visited uncovered the presence of about 20 pounds of finely powdered asbestos in four boxes, two of which were uncovered. This material was stored in the Chemistry Lab. No one (Department Head, Principal, nor Superintendent) was aware of its presence nor how long it had been there. It has since been removed.

Another system built a new high school, but left all chemicals in the old building which is now a junior high. Many of these have exceeded their shelf life and are in a hazardous state (e.g. crystalized picric acid). At the request of the school, we have segregated this material and arrangements are being made for its disposal.

Improper Storage of Chemicals
Most material is stored alphabetically. As a result, substances that react with each other are stored next to each other creating an opportunity for spontaneous reactions.

Improper Storage of Flammables
Many times flammables are stored in wooden cabinets or out in the open rather than properly ventilated storage cabinets. Hexane, a component in rubber cement, can usually be smelled in Art Rooms.

Ventilation Problems
No where did we observe kilns and ceramic programs being vented. Noxious odors are present whenever a kiln is fired. Some schools use powdered glazes, some of which contain lead, cadmium and/or chromium. This powder is spilled on the floor when carried from bin to mixing tub. Both students and teachers are breathing these carcinogens. Worse still, the dust is transmitted throughout the entire school because the room lacks its own ventilation system.

Use of Glazes Containing Heavy Metals
One incident illustrates the problem in this system at high school level, a teacher uses only leadless glazes. But in the middle school (grades 6,7,8) glazes containing lead are used. Unless these youngsters thoroughly wash their hands after using this powdered material, they are ingesting lead into their system. Incidentally, we did not observe a sink in the Ceramics Room. When this situation was called to the attention of the superintendent, he immediately removed this material.
The above is a recap and condensation of observations. We can cite specific districts, specific buildings and specific rooms in the building where these conditions exist.

One Final Horror Story

This system has a storage shed about 6' x 3½' not ventilated and attached to a wall of the high school. It contained at least 3 or 4 gallons of benzene; 6 gallons of methanol in cans almost rusted through; gallons of toluene, xylene, sulfuric acid, nitric acid, hydrochloric acid; oxalic acid and other hazardous material. No ventilation; in a student area -- a time bomb waiting to explode!
POSITION STATEMENT ON UNIVERSAL LABELING

The New Jersey FMBA, representing over 5000 career firefighters, firmly believes that Universal Labeling is the heart of the NJ Right-to-Know. Firefighters, like all emergency responders, are called upon to assist at situations where hazardous materials may be present. Like all other emergency responders, we must gather information, make decisions, and then take actions based upon what is immediately known about a situation, be it a leak, spill, or fire. The completeness, availability, and the ability to readily understand that information is just as important as the speed at which we must work to protect the site, the community, and ourselves. Universal Labeling provides that opportunity as it allows us to more accurately gauge the size of the problem. Combining Universal Labeling with a labeling system that provides immediate characteristic identification only serves to enhance our ability to gather information and make informed decisions. It is truly a key to the most effective method of handling a hazardous materials incident.

A good analogy to the loss of Universal Labeling would be a situation in which a person were placed in an unfamiliar city, with their life in danger and then provided with a map of the city. If only half of the street signs were posted it would be very simple to make a wrong turn and lose your life. The Emergency Services Information Survey is our map and Universal Labeling would be our street signs. Allow us the chance to do our jobs the way it should be done. Don't leave us lost in a hazardous materials incident trying to figure out which way to turn.

George Browne
Chairman
Firefighter Health and Safety