ACCOUNTABILITY, ASBESTOS AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS: THE CASE OF BARYULGIL

Lee C. Moerman*  
University of Wollongong

Sandra L. van der Laan  
University of Sydney

Paper prepared for presentation at 6th Accounting History Conference,  
Wellington NZ, August 2010  
Resubmitted 29th April 2010

*Corresponding Author  
School of Accounting and Finance  
University of Wollongong  
Wollongong 2522  
+61 (0)2 4221 5575  
leem@uow.edu.au
ACCOUNTABILITY, ASBESTOS AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS: THE CASE OF BARYULGIL

ABSTRACT

This paper documents the history of corporate paternalism and the effects of asbestos mining on the Indigenous community at Baryulgil in northern New South Wales. Despite the lack of profitability of the asbestos mine at Baryulgil, the operations continued for over 30 years leaving a legacy of asbestos-related issues. The transfer of social responsibility for Indigenous human rights from the State to a corporate entity lacking appropriate accountability mechanisms is evidenced in this historical case study. The Baryulgil case is instructive in a number of ways: first it demonstrates the subtlety with which human rights abuses can occur in an environment where paternalistic attitudes towards Indigenous peoples prevail; it demonstrates the clash between pursuit of corporate objectives and human rights; and finally it demonstrates the denial of corporate accountability in the asbestos industry.

Keywords: Asbestos; James Hardie; Baryulgil; Indigenous Australians; Corporate Accountability, human rights