

FILE NAME: Owens-Corning (OC)

DATE: 1962 Aug 21

DOC#: OC197

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Excerpt - Report from Dept of Health - Objectives and General Plan for Occupational Health Study of the Asbestos Products Industry

WCT 1000

OBJECTIVES AND GENERAL PLAN FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH STUDY
OF THE ASBESTOS PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

August 21, 1962

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Division of Occupational Health

Public Health Service

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

malignancy associated with asbestosis. The published data in this regard are based largely on mortality statistics and autopsy records of former employees in asbestos industries. While some of the reports strongly suggest that lung cancer is an occupational hazard of asbestos workers, the literature in this respect is by no means unanimous and the data are often conflicting.

Several factors may account for this apparent discrepancy in the technical literature. Diagnostic criteria for asbestosis are often poorly defined, making valid comparisons of studies difficult, if not impossible. Conclusions are too frequently applied to a broad classification encompassing all asbestos workers and are not confined to the group under investigation. Information on such factors as sex, community air pollution, personal smoking habits and family history of cancer are absent in the majority of reports. Environmental data are scanty. No clear attempt is made to define exposures to different asbestiform minerals or associated materials. Mortality studies often encompass a broad multi-exposure group and do not relate to a specific and single exposure. Despite the accumulated knowledge, the following questions remain unanswered:

1. What is the prevalence of pneumoconiosis in asbestos workers actively employed in the asbestos-products industry?
2. What is the significance of exposure to different sources and forms of asbestos and to other materials commonly employed in this industry in the development of pneumoconiosis?
3. What is the role of non-occupational respiratory disease in the development of the pneumoconiosis?
4. Are malignancies occupational risks of the asbestos worker in the asbestos-products industry? If so, what are the important etiological factors?

5. What other diseases, if any, may be associated with exposure to asbestos or other materials commonly used in the asbestos products industry?
6. What are safe levels of exposures to the various materials in this industry that constitute health risks?

To secure answers for these questions, the Division of Occupational Health proposes a comprehensive study of the asbestos-products industries in the United States. The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the health status of the asbestos workers in this industry with special attention to diseases of the respiratory tract.
2. To determine which environmental factors have an adverse effect upon the health of asbestos workers in the asbestos-products industry.
3. To determine the relationship between occupational exposure and cause of death of asbestos workers.
4. To develop medical and environmental criteria and procedures for the control of health risks identified by the studies.

General Plan of Study

A. Record Studies

Information on the past and present significance of the asbestos problem and its magnitude can be obtained through an analysis of mortality and morbidity data relating to asbestos-exposed workers. These studies will include workers who have left the industry during the last 25 years, those presently exposed, and those who will be leaving the industry, all on a continuing basis.

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B. Laboratory Studies

Laboratory research is necessary to develop sampling and appraisal techniques which will permit a detailed definition of asbestos dust exposures. In addition, animal studies are needed to evaluate any relationship between asbestos fiber exposure and tumor formation.

C. In-plant Environmental Studies

The environmental studies will be designed to define the working environment of the various plants. Particular emphasis will be placed on levels and nature of exposures to asbestos dust. Exposures to other air contaminants -- silica and mineral dusts, fumes, mists, vapors and gases - which may be associated with asbestos or its processing also will be carefully assessed. [

D. In-plant Medical Studies

The medical studies will be designed to develop specific information relative to the effects of asbestos dust and other associated exposures on health. They will include medical examinations of a substantial portion of the asbestos-workers in the asbestos-products industry and provide a sufficient background for periodic follow-up medical surveys. The medical findings will be related to the various aspects of the environmental exposures.