

FILE NAME: Newspaper & Magazine Articles (NMA)

DATE: 1968

DOC#: NMA204

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Washington Post Story Referred to in Minutes of Shipbuilders Council of America, Apr. 2, 1969 -U.S Warned of Asbestos Peril

U.S. Warned of Asbestos Peril

By Thomas O'Toole
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Government has been told that the Nation's 550,000 shipyard workers face a serious occupational hazard from the asbestos in their place of work.

The warning was given last September to the Navy, the Labor Department and the Public Health Service by New York's Mount Sinai Hospital, where autopsies have shown that most men who worked in shipyards had "extensive" asbestos fibers in their lungs, a condition that often leads to serious lung disease.

So far, the three Federal departments have made no public acknowledgment of the report or its contents.

Autopsies have been done on about 1000 persons who died at Mount Sinai, Veterans Hospital in Queens and Veterans Administration Hospital in the Bronx in the last two years. Roughly half of these

had asbestos traces in their lungs, but a staggering 50 percent of 70 men who had been shipyard workers at one time in their lives had "considerable" asbestos fibers in their lungs. Some of these men had spent as little as one week as shipyard workers.

Asbestos Dust

"The incredible thing is none of these men were asbestos workers," said Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, director of Environmental Medicine at Mount Sinai yesterday.

Dr. Selikoff explained that only about 1 per cent of the men worked in shipyards but die asbestos directly, but most shipyard work is concentrated in small places, like ship's holds, that just about all shipyard workers "inhale asbestos dust on the job."

The 70 ex-shipyard workers on whom autopsies have been performed so far by Mount Sinai had been electricians,

boiler makers, steam fitters, welders, riveters and enginemen—men who never handled asbestos.

Mount Sinai's study follows one in Britain where asbestos hazards in four types of work were examined. The results were reported in a recent issue of The Annals of Occupational Hygiene, a British medical journal.

Asbestos Fibers

In the next year, the report said, dockyard workers from no fewer than 12 different occupations (from engine fitters to alskers) had been accepted by British health authorities as victims of asbestos, a chronic inflammation of the lungs that causes shortness of breath and heart disease.

The most in ten of these 12 occupations work in small, "confined spaces" where they breathe in asbestos fibers by accident. Of an estimated 50,000 workers in the four-

British dockyards, only 4,000 were in direct contact with asbestos.

A fatal cancer of the chest wall called mesothelioma is rampant up in dockyard and its in five different occupations, the British report said. This is a cancer almost peculiar to asbestos workers, a fact none of the victims in Britain in the British air worked with asbestos. It was boiler makers, ship welders, shipwrights and other laborers.

Mount Sinai's Dr. Selikoff said that he and a team of 6 men have yet to analyze the shipyard workers for cancer death. He also said that team will study another 2 autopsies done in the last 2 years for evidence of asbestos in the lungs.

But it seems clear there is a problem here," Dr. Selikoff said. "That is why I brought to the attention of the Gov-