



MOUNT SINAI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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Department of Community Medicine

December 30, 1971

Mr. Anthony Mazzocchi, Director
Citizenship-Legislative Department
Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union
1126 - 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

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Dear Mr. Mazzocchi:

On November 7, 1971, I examined 19 workmen, employed at the Paulsboro Refinery of the Mobil Oil Company. Nine were employed as welders, three as boilermakers, three as bricklayers and four as pipecoverers.

I have no way of knowing how representative a sample of the employed population these men were. It was stated that they were unselected, apparently being chosen because of their willingness to make the long trip north.

Nevertheless, the results of the examinations were disquieting. More than half of the men examined had some evidence, albeit generally limited, of either parenchymal or pleural fibrosis. These abnormalities were found in boilermakers, bricklayers and welders, in addition to pipecoverers. The x-ray abnormalities were consistent with, although not necessarily diagnostic of, pulmonary asbestosis.

Evaluation of occupational exposure for each man, was equally disconcerting. It appeared that the conditions of work were such as to allow opportunity for indirect occupational exposure to asbestos among the welders, bricklayers and boilermakers. For the pipecoverers, there was much opportunity for intimate asbestos exposure.

The results of my examinations should be interpreted with the knowledge that x-ray findings almost always lag behind anatomical changes in pulmonary asbestosis. These experiences may then represent significant asbestos exposure among refinery workers, at least under the conditions described to me. Should they represent a general state of affairs, then we could be dealing with a major occupational health problem, with a very

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uncertain future. Under similar conditions of exposure, we now find that neoplastic complications of asbestos exposure may be an important problem among shipyard workers.

I would, therefore, strongly urge immediate investigation of this question with rapid institution of appropriate industrial hygiene controls to prevent occupational exposure to asbestos among refinery workers in the Paulsboro Refinery, should these be found necessary.

Too, these initial findings suggest that a large scale survey of all current and former refinery workers at this plant be undertaken. We would not expect to find very much overt evidence of asbestosis in those men with less than 20 years from onset of exposure, but would expect to learn much concerning the extent and nature of the problem among those who had passed this point. For those men with evidence of x-ray abnormality, a system of medical surveillance should be established.

Sincerely yours,

I. J. Selikoff
Irving J. Selikoff M.D.
Professor

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