

From Jim Hansen, Public Relations

EMPLOYEE HEALTH STUDY RESULTS ANNOUNCED

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Epidemiologists have recently completed another of a series of studies involving past and current employees of the Texas Division of Dow Chemical U.S.A. This study focused on renal (kidney) cancer and examined the work histories of 26 Dow workers who have died from the disease during the 42-year history of the Freeport location. No obvious occupational cause for the disease was found in the study.

In a previously reported study, an apparent excess of kidney cancer was noted among a five percent sample of the Texas Division workforce. The study now being reported was conducted to attempt to determine whether there might be a link between the disease and workplace exposure. Work area assignments and potential exposure to specific chemical and physical agents were compared for the 26 former employees known to have died from kidney cancer and for control groups of employees who did not have the disease.

A marginally significant increased amount of kidney cancer was found associated with employment in the cell maintenance area of chlorine production. This finding is based upon five cases among men who worked in this area between 1942 and 1951. None of the exposures likely to have occurred in this job is regarded as a cause of renal cancer although asbestos and renal cancer have been linked in a previously reported study. Exposure to asbestos has been greatly reduced in the division over the years in recognition of its potential effects on the respiratory system.

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Another finding of the study was an apparent decrease in the occurrence of kidney cancer among those who had been employed in magnesium production at the division.

Both of the findings of the study were statistically significant; however, they were based upon such small numbers that the epidemiologists do not feel that the results explain the apparent excess found in the five percent sample study previously completed.

The current study is one of a continuing series of efforts to monitor the health of Dow employees. Along with continuing health surveillance programs, the company uses workplace monitoring by industrial hygienists to assure worker safety. Epidemiology studies are done to pinpoint any problems in employee groups that are not detectable either by monitoring or routine physical examinations of the individual.

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