FILE NAME: Newspaper & Magazine Articles (NMA)

DATE: 1940 Mar 21

DOC#: NMA108

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: NYT - State Study Aids Health of 300,000

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Miss Miller Reports on 3½ Years of Fighting Silicosis and Other Dust Diseases

SHE URGES LARGER STAFF

While Progress Has Been Made, Many Other Industrial Hazards Exist, She Says

The health of nearly 300,000 workers in dangerous trades in New York State is better safeguarded than it was three and a half years ago as a result of the industrial hygiene program instituted by the State Labor Department on July 1, 1936, Miss Frieda S. Miller, State Industrial Commissioner, reported yesterday to the Legislature, which appropriated $50,000 a year for five years to the Labor Department to fight silicosis and other dust diseases and combat industrial poisons.

Three and a half years of experience, especially on the Delaware aqueduct project, have taught methods of preventing, though not of curing, silicosis in rock drilling, Miss Miller reported. Progress also was made in controlling other dust diseases.

"But we have only scratched the surface in detecting and controlling other occupational hazards," she warned, "hazards generated with the speed of invention, with the same mass market as technological change itself. The development of new industries, new chemicals, new processes brings in their wake a daily train of new poisons and new uses for old ones."

Miss Miller concluded wtih the hope that the legislators would "weigh the need for continuing and increasing the technical personnel which alone can guarantee industrial health in the world of tomorrow."

Physicians of the Division of Industrial Hygiene of the Labor Department, the report said, have conducted 37,850 medical examinations of workers, and made 17,229 chemical analyses of air, rock and human tissues. Engineers of the division have examined 4,308 plans for ventilating systems, involving 23,446 machines and 39,317 workers.

An industrial code to protect workers engaged in rock drilling already is in effect, while those for foundries, stone-cutting and stone-crushing are prepared and will be announced soon. A widespread educational campaign also has been carried on among employers, workers, physicians and industrial engineers.

The rock drilling code has "stood up" under a "searing test" in the driving of the 85-mile Delaware aqueduct through the heaviest silica-bearing rock there is. Six thousand workers there had to be protected not only against silicosis and falling rock but against fog and poisonous gases.

The biggest job of industrial hygiene testing ever undertaken in the United States was done by the Labor Department on the Delaware water tunnel, the report declared.

A continuous stream of water lays silica dust as the drilling proceeds, ventilating fans suck out the dust-laden air, other fans expel poisonous gases after a dynamiting, and water streams over the blasted rock. Workers are kept out of the dynamited heading for fifteen minutes to three hours.

Proper measures can "unquestionably prevent silicosis," the report asserted, adding that whether funds and personnel should be continued for the work "becomes a question of public policy."

Thousands of workers in foundries and other plants exposed to grain dust, wood dust, asbestos, brick, feldspar, fur, wool, pumice, rock wool, slate, clay, whiting, hematite, salt, garnet and emery have been X-rayed.

In addition, 1,452 workers exposed to dust containing mercury, aniline and wood dyes, moth repellents, scouring powder, grain, fertilizers and plastics have been examined and more than 3,000 special tests made. Proper ventilation has protected 23,000 workers since July 1, 1936.