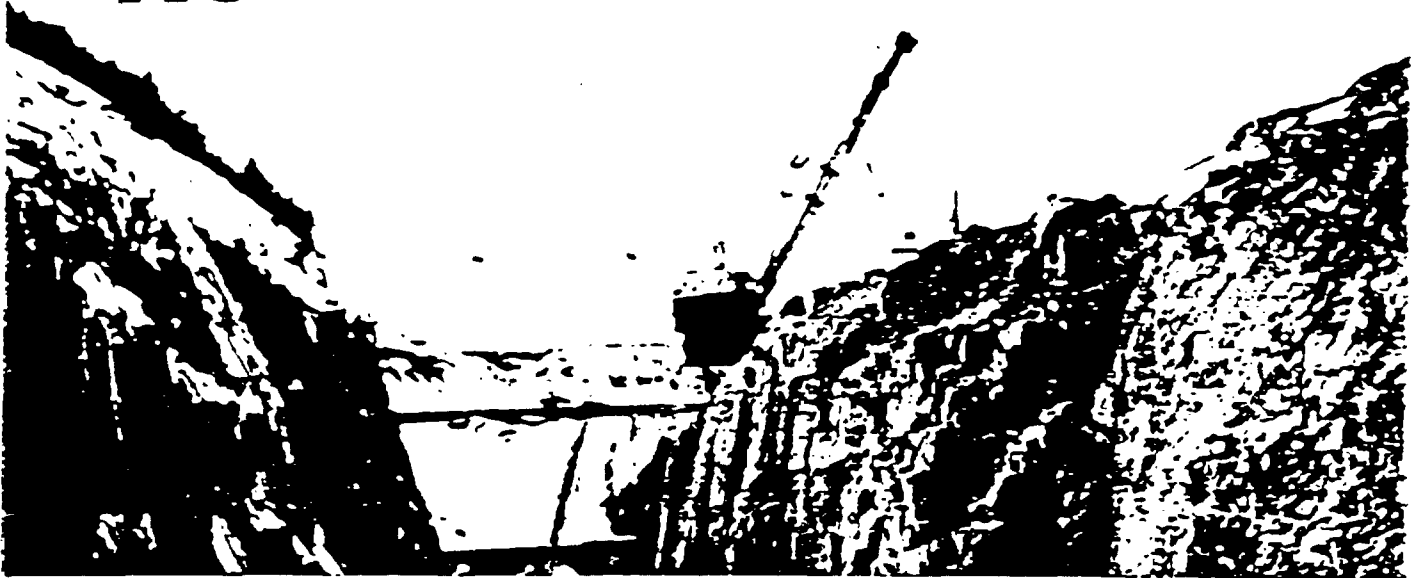


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Asbestos hearing held

*Danger of lung cancer cited
as New York City ponders ban*

The use of asbestos as a fireproofing and insulating material for buildings in New York City eventually may be outlawed because medical research shows the material can cause lung cancer.

The possibility of a ban was suggested last week at public hearings aimed at making permanent the temporary rules now governing the method of spraying asbestos on the exposed steel surfaces of steel frame buildings.

Robert Rickles, commissioner of the city's Department of Air Resources, said that to enforce the regulations on the five building jobs where spraying operations were under way held the full attention of five of his field staff of 50. Spraying operations at five buildings halted in mid-April because of visible emission of asbestos into the area around the job sites.

About two weeks ago, spraying operations resumed on the World Trade Center. There a nonasbestos material is now being used, according to Austin J. Tobin, executive director of the Port of New York Authority (ENR 5/28 p. 17).

Although Rickles did not mention the possibility of a complete ban on sprayed asbestos he indicated this goal in recent conversations with Tobin. Rickles' emphasis on the manhours needed to enforce the regulations suggested that he thought such policing a less efficient method of protecting public health than a ban.

Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, director of the Division of Environmental Medicine at New York City's Mount Sinai Hospital, and one of those researching the effects of asbestos on workers, said he was not certain that other mineral fibers beside asbestos—rock wool and fiberglass, for instance—are safe if inhaled. I am not willing to play Russian roulette with the people of New York, he said, and I'm unwilling to wait until further research determines the safety of the nonasbestos materials.

Selikoff said the amount of asbestos that will cause cancer is unknown, but that 20 years or more of inhalation of asbestos by workers makes them highly prone to the disease.

Representatives of contractors and manufacturers of sprayed-asbestos products promised full cooperation in promulgation and enforcement of the regulations. They also indicated they would develop a wider range of nonasbestos fireproofing materials.

