

**MEDICAL RESEARCH
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R&S 105847

Mystery illness hits PVC workers

DOCTORS are puzzled by a mystery illness affecting a group of men working at a plastics factory—and which may have made some of them impotent. The men, all of whom have worked at the Vinatex PVC plant at

Staveley, near Chesterfield, Derbyshire, have been subjected to exhaustive tests for many months.

Some of them have been off work for up to a year.

As well as the threat to their sex lives the men also complain of stiffening of the joints, bad circulation, shortness of breath and even impaired mental faculties.

Dr. Anne Walker, a consultant dermatologist who examined 36 of the men said: "This is an extraordinary new situation.

"We cannot say how long the tests might take. We may not get any further than we have at present."

In the meantime the patients are being treated with steroid drugs, like Cortizone.

About seven of the men complain of impotency. Whether the symptoms are directly involved with the PVC works will not be known until the cause of the illness has been pinpointed — but some of the men involved have contracted what is known as "cold, blue hands."

This causes small holes in the bones of the hands and hardening of the skin — a recognised danger in the manufacture of PVC.

The impotency in the men Dr. Walker has seen could be caused by the source of the other symptoms, she says — but it could also be caused by their worrying over their condition.

No one at the Staveley Plant or at Vinatex headquarters at Havant, Hants could be contacted yesterday for comment.

Workers at the Staveley plant had no doubt that the symptoms their colleagues are suffering from were caused by the works, a union official said last night.

Mr. Bill Mitchell, district secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, however, thought the symptoms mentioned were from the period before rigid safety precautions were introduced.

Men in direct contact with PVC manufacture now have to wear safety masks and protective clothing.

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