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UPCOMING MEETING IN FRANCE ON ASBESTOS CAUSING SOME UNEASINESS: ✓

Lyon, France, is rightfully known as the gastronomic capital of the world—but a closed meeting to be held there Sept. 25-27 is causing some upset stomachs in certain quarters of the U.S. scientific community.

The meeting in question is being sponsored by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), an agency of the World Health Organization, and the purpose is to review recent data on asbestos exposure. That data continues to indicate increasingly greater risk of mesothelioma and other cancers from smaller and smaller fibers and among people, such as wives and children, who are not heavily exposed to the material.

What worries some people in public health in the U.S. is the fear that industry may use the meeting to bring about a revision of IARC's Volume 14 of 1977, a monograph on asbestos as one of a series of IARC monographs on the evaluation of the carcinogenic risk of chemicals to man. A high industry source, who asked not to be quoted by name, denied any such intent and said the roster of those attending the meeting included many hostile to industry.

Volume 14, which represented the views of a Working Group which met in Lyon Dec. 14-17, 1976 and was headed by Dr. David P. Rall, Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, came down rather sharply on asbestos. Among its comments:

* "In humans, occupational exposure to chrysotile, amosite, anthophyllite and mixed fibers containing crocidolite has resulted in a high incidence of lung cancer; a predominantly tremolitic material mixed with anthophyllite and small amounts of chrysotile has also caused an increased incidence of lung cancer. Many pleural and peritoneal mesotheliomas have been observed after occupational exposure to crocidolite, amosite and chrysotile. . . Mesotheliomas also occur in individuals living in the neighborhood of asbestos factories and crocidolite mines and in household contacts of asbestos workers."

* "Occupational exposure to asbestos may occur during the mining of fibrous minerals, as well as of minerals embodied in rocks, which may contain asbestiform fibers as a contaminant."

* "Both cigarette smoking and occupational exposure to asbestos fibers independently increase lung cancer incidence, but when they are present together they act in a multiplicative fashion."

* "At present, it is not possible to assess whether there is a level of exposure in humans below which an increased risk of cancer would not occur."

Since publication of that monograph, reports have continued to implicate progressively smaller numbers of fibers in the pathogenesis of asbestos-related disease, including the recent report in the British Journal of Industrial Medicine (*OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY LETTER*, Aug. 1, 15). Many of those reports have come from industry itself.

The industry source commented to us that, in perspective, the conclusions in the monograph still provided the basis for continued use of asbestos in commerce.

What worries some public health officials in the U.S., and perhaps elsewhere, is that industry—despite such reports—may be working through IARC to publish a softer monograph on asbestos. IARC monographs have no legal status in standards-setting in U.S. but they are a central source of information to scientists in many countries and are frequently referenced in scientific publications.

Fueling the fears of those officials was a study of fibrous glass exposure funded two or three years ago by a European chemical consortium through IARC. The University College in Cardiff, Wales, has been conducting the study for IARC and the chemical concerns. A number of those investigators will be on the program at Lyon. In fact, one report is that the Lyon meeting was originally intended to be concerned with inorganic fibers but because of insufficient contributions of papers on the subject, it was decided to focus on asbestos. Another contradictory report is that the meeting was always intended to focus on asbestos.

Note: The Asbestos Information Association/North America will hold its annual industry-government conference Sept. 19-20 in conjunction with its ninth annual meeting at Stouffer's National Center Hotel, Arlington, Va. Many officials of the Government, as well as from Congress, will address the meeting on a number of topics governing asbestos exposure and control. Guy G. Gabrielson, Jr., chairman of the board of Nicolet, Inc., will serve as conference chairman.