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High Levels of Asbestos Found In 3 Paints and 2 Talcums Here

By GRACE LICHTENSTEIN

Three brands of textured ceiling paint and two brands of talcum powder have been named by the city's Environmental Protection Administration as having heavy asbestos-fiber levels that might contribute to lung cancer years after a person inhaled their dust.

The paints, named at a news conference at a construction site on West 147th Street yesterday, are:

QA-Coustex textured spray finish, manufactured by Amsterdam Color Works, the Bronx, said to contain 50 per cent mixed asbestos minerals.

QTexture, manufactured by Purity Paint Products Corporation, Brooklyn, said to contain 60 to 80 per cent mixed asbestos minerals.

QImperial QT texture finish, manufactured by the U.S. Gypsum Company, said to contain 5 to 10 per cent of one kind of asbestos.

The talcs are Landers baby powder and Johnson & Johnson baby powder.

According to a spokesman for the Department of Air Resources, the paints are delivered in powder form, mixed into a liquid, then sprayed on ceiling interiors to finish.

Acting on information from the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 9, the department had several paint samples analyzed by Dr. Irving Selikoff of the Mount Sinai Environmental Sciences Laboratory, who reported the high asbestos quantities.

The department issued 13 cease-and-desist orders beginning in May to builders who

were using the paints. The city's new air-pollution code, which went into effect Feb. 27, outlaws the spraying of any material containing asbestos.

Air Resources Commissioner Fred C. Hart said yesterday that, as a result the manufacturers had come forward with asbestos-free paints.

The environment agency's concern about asbestos in baby powder surfaced almost a year ago, when Jerome Kretchmer, the Environmental Protection Administrator, advised consumers to stop using talcum until suspicions about its asbestos content were cleared up.

At the time, Mr. Kretchmer said two brands tested showed from 5 to 25 per cent asbestos fibers in them but declined to name them until tests on other brands were made.

Other Tests Awaited

After repeated inquiries from newsmen, the agency released a letter dated June 8 from James R. Marshall, director of public information, to a consumer naming Landers and Johnson & Johnson as the brands. He said the agency was still awaiting results of tests on other brands, since it suspected that "virtually every talcum powder contains some asbestos."

A spokesman for Johnson & Johnson denied yesterday that the company's baby powder contained asbestos, saying the Food and Drug Administration in the last year had accepted test results from three independent laboratories proving this. He said the E.P.A. knew of these test results. The Landers Company could not be reached for comment.

The Food and Drug Administration is also investigating the possible health hazards of talcum containing asbestos.

In an interview, Mr. Marshall suggested that plain corn starch was a cheap and acceptable substitute for baby powder.

Dr. Selikoff, considered the leading health authority on asbestos, has long warned of the danger of lung cancer. Asbestos spray is used to fireproof the steel beams of new buildings.