

ASBESTOS KILLS - NEW FACTS?

COMMENTARY

on Mrs Nancy Tait's pamphlet
May, 1977

GENERAL

Mrs Nancy Tait's new pamphlet covers a wide field and its contents need to be evaluated by people whose professional knowledge covers medicine (including medical care, diagnosis and treatment), pathology, epidemiology, statistics, community health, waste disposal, industrial hygiene and legal compensation.

To deal with all these facets of the asbestos/health problem is ambitious and understandably difficult within the compass of a short pamphlet, and it is equally difficult for a brief commentary to discuss the subject in depth or to deal with every single error. We do not comment on the slurs which the pamphlet casts, unnecessarily, on the professional reputation of individual doctors. There are however several points on which obvious comment can be made immediately and with reasonable brevity for the benefit of readers who are not in a position to verify references for themselves.

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"A spokesman for the Asbestos Information Committee reported, at an Industry-Government Conference in Washington in September, 1976".

No spokesman for the Asbestos Information Committee reported at this Washington conference. Mr A A Cross addressed it in his role (at that time) of Chairman, Standing Committee, International Asbestos Information Conference.

Chrysotile a carcinogen

The abstract of Professor Corbett McDonald's latest presentation "Mesothelioma and Asbestos - Fibre Type" concludes that "the risk of mesothelioma after crocidolite exposure would appear to be at least 50 times greater than that associated with chrysotil production." This does not mean that mesothelioma cannot be caused by chrysotile, but it does mean that chrysotile is probably only likely to be a cause of mesothelioma where exposure has been particularly heavy or where a man is exceptionally susceptible.

Nobody in the UK has ever claimed that "chrysotile is safe". Enormous efforts are made to minimise exposure to it, in view of its known associations with all three asbestos-related diseases.

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DHSS Cancer Epidemiology and Clinical Trial Unit

The American National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) whatever it may have published, could not possibly have the results of the Trials Unit study because this has not yet been completed. The most that has reliably appeared is the evidence of Mr Julian Peto, published to the Advisory Committee

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JHM