



HEGA REPORT

A/C Pipe Producers Association

Suite 1113 • 1875 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009 • (202) 232-2100

VOL. I, NO. 7

DECEMBER 22, 1975

OSHA Extends Deadline on Asbestos Standard

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has agreed to extend until February 9, 1976, the comment period on the proposed standard for occupational exposure to asbestos. The previous comment deadline was December 8, 1975.

A number of interested parties responded that the proposed revisions were exceedingly complex and thus, additional time would be required to "compile relevant data and information". In supporting the 60-day extension, OSHA pointed out that the action "... *will not unduly delay the standards setting process* ..." because an inflationary impact statement must be prepared.

The Asbestos Information Association (AIA) is coordinating the preparation of an industry response to the proposed 0.5 fiber/cc (TWA) standard. Guy A. Gabrielson, Jr., Chairman of the Board, Nicolet Industries, Inc., will chair the industry task force. The consulting firm of Roy F. Weston, Inc., of West Chester, Pennsylvania, has been retained to conduct an economic and technological feasibility study for all segments of the asbestos industry. Dr. Hans Weill, AIA's medical advisor, will review, analyze and update the vast body of knowledge regarding asbestos and health. A summary report will be prepared by each industry segment and AIA will present the collective response to the Department of Labor.

The Extension appeared in the Federal Register; Vol. 40, No. 243; Wednesday; December 17, 1975.

A Look at the Cancer Figures

By HARRY SCHWARTZ

Cancer is a terrible disease that claims hundreds of thousands of lives each year in this country. It is not surprising therefore that fear of cancer has become a political rocket fuel powering much of the increased environmental agitation in this country in recent years as well as inspiring more than a little of the rapidly increasing government intrusion into private business activity of every sort.

The armies that march against atomic power stations under the banner "No Nukes" fear the malign influence of invisible radiation that may cause leukemia as well as solid cancers. Saccharin is denounced by the FDA which sees it as a source of bladder cancer. Unions whose members work with asbestos as well as with a long list of common and uncommon chemicals are on the alert to protect their members from cancer originating in their jobs. Even Scotch and beer have come under suspicion lately as reports tell of their containing nitrosamines which some scientists believe are carcinogenic.

Continued Indifferences

In sharp contrast to these and other current expressions of cancerphobia is, of course, the continued indifference of tens of millions of smokers to the long demonstrated link between cigaret smoking and lung cancer. But many of the nicotine addicts claim their cigalets give them pleasure and relief of tension which make risking cancer worthwhile.

Given the often impassioned current debate about cancer and its possible environmental, occupational and nutritional sources, the National Center for Health Statistics (a unit of what was until recently the Department of HEW) has performed a service by publishing some very pertinent data about the causes of death in this country, including cancer. These statistics suggest a perspective about cancer that justifies intelligent and informed concern rather than the emotional panic that seems to animate the more extreme crusaders against environmental and other carcinogens.

In 1975 roughly half of the 1,924,000 Americans who died were victims of cardiovascular disease, with heart diseases

claiming 728,190 lives and cerebrovascular diseases, 172,520. Only about 20% of last year's deaths—396,060—resulted from cancer. And among the cancers, the two most deadly were tumors of the digestive system which killed about 105,000 people and

These statistics suggest a perspective about cancer that justifies intelligent and informed concern rather than the emotional panic that seems to animate the more extreme crusaders against environmental and other carcinogens.

lung and other respiratory system cancers which claimed almost 99,000 victims. The only other cause of death in this same order of magnitude was accidents which caused almost 108,000 deaths last year, half of these in motor vehicle accidents.

Much of the cancerphobia now rampant is caused by the fact that deaths caused by malignancies are increasing. From 351,000 in 1973, they rose to 396,000 in 1978.

Those who would justify greatly increased concern about cancer from this rise must argue in effect that we are just beginning to see the baleful consequences of past heedless and mindless exposure of the population to radiation and carcinogenic materials and chemicals. Doubters are reminded that it may take 20 years or longer after a person has been exposed to cancer-causing agents before a malignant tumor shows up. It is in the 1980s and 1990s, we are told, that the frightful toll of past mistakes will become evident.

That proposition cannot be proved or disproved, of course, though we may note that radiation (from medical X-rays and radioactive substances) has been around for a long time, as have been many of the industrial materials suspected of being carcinogens. And tens of millions of Americans, of course, have been smoking cigalets since the 1920s and 1930s. Such argu-

ments would suggest that the burden of proof is on those who tout the most pessimistic scenarios.

Moreover the official data suggest that cancer death rates have risen much more slowly and for different reasons than the current public debate would suggest. The most important reason for the observed increase in cancer deaths and death rates this past decade, the Center for Health Statistics data show, is simply the aging of the American population. The American people have been getting older on the average for many years now, both because the number surviving beyond 65 or 70 is increasing rapidly and because the birth rate has trended downward for years.

What the center statisticians have done is to age-adjust the mortality data. They have taken the death rates for each decade of human life in different years and applied them to a fixed population, that of 1940 with the age distribution of that year. Doing this makes it possible to compare the death rates of different years without the complicating and misleading influence of changing age structure. When that is done, the cancer death rate is shown to have increased only about 2.5% between 1968 and 1978. Before age adjustment, the 1968-78 cancer death rate seems to have jumped over 12%, or much more than when age is taken into account.

(Similar age-adjusted figures published by the American Cancer Society are shown in the accompanying graph.)

Hard to Justify Hysteria

Cancer is a terrible disease, but if it is increasing only 2.5% or so a decade—when age is taken into account—it becomes hard to justify hysteria.

But there is another factor that needs to be taken into account. Over the past decade the age-adjusted death rates for heart and cardiovascular diseases have dropped sharply, more than 20% in the case of heart disease and almost 40% in the case of cardiovascular disease.

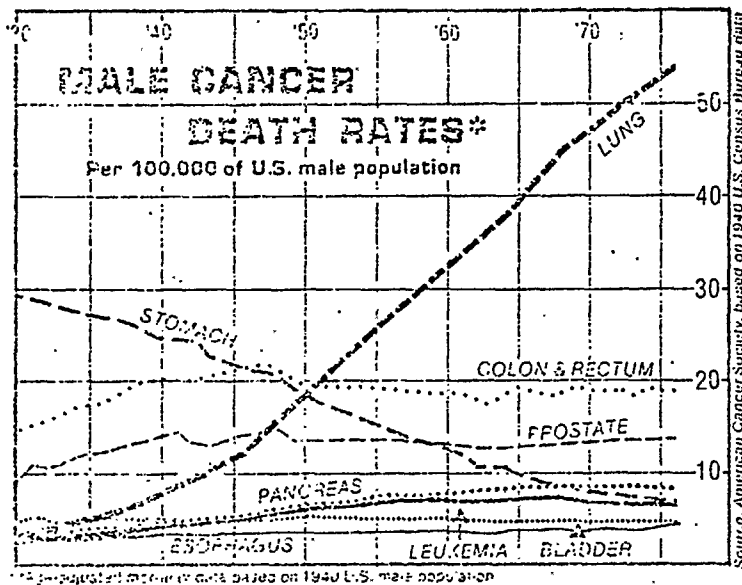
These data indicate that an American is now significantly less likely than he was a decade ago to die of a heart attack, stroke, or related ailments. But in the end we all die, regardless of cause. Once that fact is considered, it may even be argued that the 2.5% increase in age-adjusted cancer death rates between 1968 and 1978 is remarkably modest.

124-120 WALL STREET JOURNAL,
EASTERN EDITION
DAILY 1.45.000

NOV 15 1979

- OVER -

CAPCO JEN 0010803



To some the kind of political arithmetic used here to reckon the chances of an individual dying of heart disease or cancer may seem an unpleasant subject for discussion. But it is in terms of such data that any rational argument about the cancer danger must be conducted. And the truth of that fact is underlined by the HEW statistics which show that the only major type of cancer whose age-adjusted rate has gone up very sharply since 1968 is lung cancer and related respiratory malignancies. That points again to the one certainty in this discussion: The most effective anti-cancer action Americans can take is to stop smoking. Unfortunately, that is not about to happen.

Mr. Schwartz is a researcher affiliated with the Department of Surgery at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.