MAR 3 1975

Job-Linked Cancer Perils Kin

3/25/75

By Judith Randal
Washington Star Staff Writer

NEW YORK—Not only do workers whose jobs expose them to hazardous chemicals risk dying of cancer or developing other disabling chronic illnesses, but members of their families and sometimes even their neighbors run these risks as well.

At a meeting being held here this week by The New York Academy of Sciences, several such situations are under discussion and the *consensus of the experts* present is that, with some 20,000 new chemical compounds a year being introduced into the environment — and millions already a part of it — there are bound to be more.

Yesterday, for example, Dr. Henry Anderson of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health told the meeting that there is evidence from nine countries suggesting that a rare type of lung cancer that occurs among asbestos workers also attacks their wives, sons and daughters more often than one would expect.

ANDERSON AND HIS colleagues at the agency, which is a part of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, have recently undertaken a study of 1,084 men who were exposed to asbestos at an unidentified U.S. factory between 1941 and 1954.

In the years since then, two of the men have died of the rare cancer — called mesothelioma — and so have two of their children. In addition, a man and a woman, also the children of asbestos workers in the study sample have been found to have the same kind of tumor and are undergoing therapy.

Like most carcinogens, or cancer-causing substances, asbestos does not act at once. A lag time of 25 to 30 years is typical. Besides, the tumors are unlikely to appear before middle age. Thus, since many of the children of the workers in his study are still under 50, they still have before them many years of high mesothelioma risk, Anderson said.

Interviewed after his presentation, Anderson said that asbestos is by no means the only harmful chemical that may silently injure family members who live close to the factories where their breadwinners work or otherwise have contact with the job environment.

RELATIVES OF PEOPLE who work with polychlorinated biphenyls have been exposed to these solvents when the men bring them home in their clothes, and so have developed an unusual form of acne, he said. And far more serious, it has been shown that people whose homes were in the vicinity of a Pennsylvania beryllium plant shared with the factory workers a definite risk of developing berylliosis, a serious and progressively dangerous lung disease.

Other reported examples linked to occupational exposures which resulted in family or community health risks included the following:

- A high rate of cancer among women doctors and nurses in operating rooms and a high rate of birth defects among their children. According to data presented by Dr. Thomas H. Corbett at the University of Michigan Medical Center, experiments on pregnant mice exposed to one type of anesthetic produced cancers in the animals and their offspring while pregnant mice exposed only to room air remained tumor-free, as did their offspring. Corbett suggested that similar experiments should be conducted to test other types of anesthetics for their potentially harmful effects.
- A *suspiciously high rate* of lung cancer among women in Anaconda, Montana where there is a copper smelter employing only men. Thought to be responsible is the arsenic which is a byproduct of the smelting process and a sizable component of the local air pollution.
- Polyvinyl chloride, the plastic whose production is linked to a rare form of cancer may also be associated with birth defects.

MONS 069826

March 25, 1975