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Sprayed Asbestos Viewed With Growing Alarm

Careless spraying of asbestos insulating and fireproofing material is an air-pollution problem that has become a serious health hazard, Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, professor in medicine and environmental medicine, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, warns.

Regulations should be stringent, rapidly prepared and quickly enforced, Dr. Selikoff contends. His dramatic presentation at the Las Vegas convention of the IAWCC and many personal appearances since have produced a sobering shock upon his audiences, since much of his material is backed with dramatic slides, scientific experiments and results of his intensive investigation of the problem.

Dr. Selikoff says that one out of every 4 or 5 asbestos workers dies of lung cancer. The very fine mineral fibers are found almost invariably in the lungs of persons autopsied in New York City.

Once the fibers get into the lungs, there is no way to remove them and they cannot be dissolved, he maintains. Dust counts taken during asbestos-spraying jobs show "on the order of 20 times the normal amount" of dust in the air, he says.

Entire buildings are sometimes "contaminated for life" because asbestos fibers are left loose on pipes, columns and beams and these "dead spaces" are often used as return air ducts for the building's circulation system, which exposes occupants of the building to constant peril.

A means has been found, observes Dr. Selikoff, for minimizing the circulation of loose particles in wrapped asbestos coverings, but no thoroughly satisfactory method of control for the spraying process has yet been perfected. Until such a means is determined, the only procedure which can save large segments of the population from serious resperitory problems is to keep spraying areas well protected and dampened, and use the most careful housekeeping procedures in clean-up and removal of loose material. Workers are warned to use protective masks at all times, to always apply material "away from prevailing winds" and to carefully wash both their bodies and clothes as soon as possible after exposure. Exteriors of buildings should be thoroughly covered.

"Even at best, however," contends Dr. Selikoff, "these are interim measures," for no thoroughly safe method has yet been found to control the hazards involved in the spray-application process, since after the material dries, loose particles are free to thoroughly contaminate large areas both in and surrounding a building thus treated.

"I urge manufacturers and industry to view this threat seriously and find immediate means for controlling the hazards to millions of innocent citizens."

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