

FILE NAME: RT Vanderbilt (RTV)

DATE: 1988 Oct 3

DOC#: RTV010

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Newspaper Article - Secret Deal Reached on
Talc Regulations

Secret Deal Reached on Talc Regulations

Editor's Note: This is the second of four articles on an internal government report finding R.T. Vanderbilt Co. exerted pressure to delay and revise proposed regulations governing talc.

By Alan Emory
Times Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON — An internal investigation shows that a govern-

ment scientist wrote a memorandum favorable to a Northern New York mining operation long before he was assigned to the project.

The probe also discloses that the memo resulted from a secret agreement between the R.T. Vanderbilt Co. and federal workers after it appeared that the government might adopt a standard labeling Vanderbilt talc as asbestos.

The investigative report on in-

dustrial pressure to revise preliminary standards on asbestos cites "14 documented meetings" from 1984 through 1986 between officials of Vanderbilt, the Norwalk, Conn.-based firm that mines and mills talc in the Connecticut area, and members of the staff of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) from Morgantown, W. Va.

Under NIOSH policy, all research activities and new ideas are reported to the director each year as proposed project plans. They are normally submitted in July or Au-

See Talc — Page 12

pattern of the talc workers."

■ On Oct. 3 a letter went to the Social Security Administration seeking information for a study on "lung cancer," and on Dec. 20 an agreement was signed with that agency formalizing the request.

■ Vanderbilt President Hugh B. Vanderbilt and two colleagues visited Morgantown Dec. 20, and Dr. Rieger, with Dr. Glenn's approval, went to Norwalk Jan. 25, 1985. That same day DRDS asked that funds be transferred to Social Security for a "mortality survey of individuals occupationally exposed to asbestos talc, silica dust, etc."

■ Vanderbilt officials visited Morgantown again Oct. 24, 1985, to discuss "mortality" and on Jan. 22, 1986, DRDS sponsored a seminar on talc and asbestos mineralogy in Morgantown conducted by Vanderbilt's Rieger, Harvey and C. Sheldon Thompson, director of mineral research.

■ Vanderbilt industrial hygienist John W. Kelse visited Dr. Gamble on March 31, June 17 and July 3, 1986. On June 27 and July 17-18, Vanderbilt's Rieger visited Morgantown, and on Aug. 22 that year Mr. Thompson and Mr. Rieger of Vanderbilt visited Dr. Glenn in Morgantown.

Events Uncovered

According to the NIOSH probe, this is the chronological story of Vanderbilt's efforts to influence the government decision:

■ On July 26, 1984, about a month after NIOSH had testified during asbestos rule hearings, Konrad C. Rieger, a Vanderbilt ceramics engineer, visited Dr. Gamble in Morgantown.

■ On Aug. 21 Mr. Rieger, Allan M. Harvey, Vanderbilt's director of environmental affairs, and Dennis M. Race, a Washington attorney for the company, paid a similar visit, during which the Vanderbilt team complained about the "inadequacy" of the 1980 study and discussed definitions of asbestos and the minerals in the Vanderbilt talc, as well as how a new government asbestos rule might affect the company.

■ On Sept. 12, Robert E. Glenn, director of the respiratory disease division, authorized Drs. Gamble, Robert E. Reger, senior mathematical statistician, and Harlan Amandus, another epidemiologist, to go to Vanderbilt's headquarters in Norwalk to discuss a new look at the 1980 study.

■ Thirteen days later Vanderbilt sent Dr. Gamble information to enable him to "analyze the mortality

From Last Page

gust, with provisions for supplementing or revising them.

Though work on a new Vanderbilt study began as early as October 1984, the NIOSH investigation report says, "no project plan" was included in the fiscal 1983-85 plans. NIOSH officials' visits to Norwalk in September 1984 were charged to a "National Coal Study and Related Research," travel in January 1985 to a "Morbidity and Mortality Study of the Industrial Sand Industry."

Although NIOSH policy calls for internal and external peer reviews and a later labor-industry-NIOSH review, "this was not done with respect to the mortality study of talc workers" at the agency's Division of Respiratory Disease Studies (DRDS).

Work on the project was "intentionally concealed" from NIOSH Director J. Donald Millar and from NIOSH researchers in Cincinnati, the probe finds.

"Not until it was certain that the study would eventually have to be made public" did key NIOSH employees "develop the strategy to have the company request a health hazard evaluation," which is required by law where employers or workers ask for help in determining the impact of potentially toxic or hazardous substances in the work place.

NIOSH Executive Officer Larry W. Sparks, who wrote the investigative report, says the evaluation "is not an appropriate mechanism for long-term epidemiological research projects."

When the evaluation request was received, the man assigned as investigator was John Gamble, a DRDS epidemiologist in Morgantown, W. Va. Dr. Gamble had participated in a 1980 NIOSH study that found worker exposure to the Vanderbilt talc was linked to greater risk of developing lung cancer.

About two weeks later, Dr. Gamble wrote a memorandum criticizing the NIOSH position on health risks of exposure to Vanderbilt talc and urging a reevaluation of NIOSH's mortality study.

Ironically, the memo ran 22 pages long and had 47 references and was, Dr. Gamble conceded, the result of several years of work, so it started long before the evaluation request.

1/10/88
10/3/88