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Doctor Asks Check On Asbestos-Cancer Link

By MIRIAM KASS
Post Medical Writer

The question of whether asbestos can cause cancer needs more looking into, a Houston doctor said Saturday at a scientific meeting of the Singleton Surgical Society at Saint Joseph Hospital.

Dr James E. Dailey said in an interview that there's no proof yet of the asbestos-cancer connection, but there is some good circumstantial evidence. He mentioned "the extremely high incidence of tumors in workers exposed to asbestos."

"ASBESTOS IS used in numerous manufacturing and building processes, insulations of air conditioning units, insulation of pipe vessels. Ship builders use a lot of it, fabricators of pipe tanks and heavy machinery, installers of manufacturers equipment.

"It is also used in office and home building — sheathing of houses and buildings. Demolishing of buildings is going on all the time, and the construction of new ones.

"It's not hard to conceive that a considerable amount of asbestos will contaminate the air." Everyone has some exposure to it, he said.

DR DAILEY, who directs the medical education at Saint Joseph, says there isn't enough evidence yet to call for any action in limiting the use of asbestos, but researchers need to find more answers:

"They have to go into the chemistry of asbestos and the possibility of combination of it with other substances. Many questions arise — whether the action of asbesos in producing tumors is mechanical (because of sharp needles) or whether it is the substance itself, or the way it combines with others."

DR DAILEY made it clear that he was not singling out asbestos as special in possibly causing or contributing to cancer.

"We don't know too much about other dusts, too — like some of the plastic dust that's involved when they manufacture carpets. What happens when some of that is stirred by carpet beating or by vacuum cleaners?

"THERE IS NOTHING in the medical literature to describe whether there is any lung reaction to such dust."

The Singleton Surgical Society was named for the late Dr A. O. Singleton, former head of the department of surgery at the University of Texas Medical Branch. Members are, or have been, surgical residents at the Medical Branch.

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