Ann. Occup. Hyg. Vol. 13, pp. 3–5. Pergamon Press 1970. Printed in Great Britain

ASBESTOS AND ASBESTOSIS*

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THE FORMS AND USES OF ASBESTOS

COMMERCIALLY important asbestos fibres fall into two main groups. The first of these is chrysotile, and the second comprises the amphiboles. Both groups are fibrous silicates, but they differ in geological origin, in chemical composition, in molecular structure, in fibre size and strength, and in other characteristics. Chrysotile, white asbestos, comes from many different places. There are slight chemical and physical variations in the fibres from different sources, but basically all have the same molecular structure. On the other hand, the amphiboles comprise at least three separate types, whose molecular structure is very similar, but whose chemical and physical properties differ more widely. Amosite (amber) and crocidolite (blue) are of commercial importance in this country, whereas anthophyllite is a Finnish fibre not used here.

The relative amounts of each fibre in world production is shown in Fig. 1 and the areas of main use in Fig. 2.

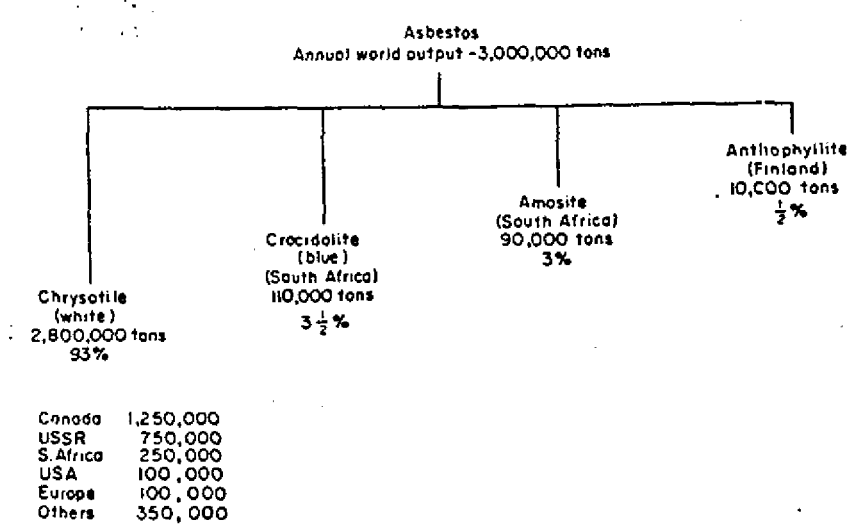


FIG. 1. World production of asbestos.