

TORONTO

David Lacey
wanted to find out if the TTC

ders will go down from
the St. George Station way
of the University line.

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Johns-Manville plant

Fear of asbestosis triggers union strike

The International Chemical Workers Union charged yesterday that asbestos fibres in the air at the Toronto plant of the Canadian Johns-Manville Co. Ltd. threaten the lives of workers and the health of neighboring residents.

A strike by the union's Local 348 has closed the plant since Sunday, with health as the main issue.

"We believe the (Ontario) Government should order the plant closed and not permit it to open until workers can be assured of a safe environment," Robert Stewart, assistant Canadian director of the union, said.

There is also concern about the effects of plant emissions on neighbors. A subdivision of 340,000 homes has sprung up near the site on Colonel Danforth Trail in eastern Scarborough, and the new Sir Oliver Mowat Collegiate Institute is across the road.

The union maintains that at least three workers have died of asbestosis, a lung disease caused by long-term inhalation of asbestos fibres.

Five of its retired members and six still working also have the disease. "These are the ones who came forward themselves—the company won't tell us all they know," Mr. Stewart said. "They say medical reports are confidential."

Union leaders were speaking at a press conference called to express their frustration about the lack of action by the company and the provincial Government.

At Queen's Park, James McNair, director of the Department of Labor's industrial safety branch, said the results of tests made in May at Johns-Manville will be known "very shortly." His branch asked the Health Department for tests following complaints from the union, he said.

Provincial standards call for no more than five asbestos fibres longer than five microns in a cubic centimetre of air. A micron is 1-25,000th of

In the past few years a new wave of research into asbestos hazards has raised alarm among some experts.

Dr. Irving Selikoff, director of the environmental health laboratory at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, a leader in the field, suggests asbestos may be the worst air pollutant. This has been scoffed at by the asbestos industry.

For the union members, Mr. Stewart said, Dr. Selikoff's findings have been frightening. He came to Toronto late in May in hopes of doing air tests in the local plant but was barred by the management, Mr. Stewart said.

Only lately have health problems been found among the Johns-Manville workers. Dr. Selikoff's theory is that the damage is cumulative and rarely shows up in less than 20 years. The Toronto plant opened 23 years ago, in 1948.

"Now we're getting it in the long-time workers," Mr. Stewart said.

On his May visit Dr. Selikoff left a tape-recorded discussion which clearly has frightened the workers, the union leader said. There have been no resignations as a result, "but a lot are saying they wished they never started their jobs."

In the recording Dr. Selikoff describes a study of 632 members of a New York insulation workers' union who handled asbestos steadily from 1943. By 1963—20 years later—255 had died, 53 more than statistically expected.

Lung cancer killed 45; statistically its expected toll was 6.6. Cancer of the stomach and colon killed 29 rather than the expected 9 or 10. Lung scarring killed 11 where no deaths were expected.

By 1967, when 47 deaths might have been predicted, 94 of the 632 men were dead.

"Now 1 of 3 men dies of lung cancer—a disaster—1 of 10 of asbestosis, 1 in 10 of mesothelioma—a disease of the

lung or stomach lining).

Dr. Selikoff now is studying death rates of asbestos workers across the United States.

He was kinder to Johns-Manville than the Toronto union spokesmen. "Johns-Manville may honestly feel there is no problem at the (Toronto) plant because they have seen no problem until now. And it's because of this weird 20-year rule. The first people to work in the plant will just be beginning to show diseases now."

Mr. Stewart said: "It's unfettered industrial homicide as far as we're concerned."

He said the system that filters fibres from the air in the plant is overloaded by 50 per cent, even on present standards. Dr. Selikoff is questioning these standards.

He is concerned about the effects of fibres too small to be seen in an optical microscope, visible only through an electrical microscope.

The company has monitoring equipment in the plant but will not tell the union the test results, Mr. Stewart said. In bargaining, the union is asking for daily air tests and full access to the results.

Johns-Manville uses asbestos—a white, grey or grey-green fibrous material—mainly with cement in Transite pipe. This is used extensively in municipal water and sewage services.

The Toronto plant employs 527 members of the chemical workers' union plus about 180 others.

The union calls wages a secondary issue in the strike. It is asking for a \$1-an-hour raise over two years on a current average rate of \$3.03. Negotiations have broken off, with no new talks in sight.

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