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CONSUMER NOTES

Asbestos Warning Given for Spackle

By FRANCES CERRA

Do-it-yourselfers who repair their own plaster or plaster board walls should be aware of recent research indicating that some commonly available spackling compounds contain asbestos, a substance that has been linked to fatal cancers and serious lung diseases.

The Environmental Sciences Laboratory at Manhattan's Mount Sinai Hospital, under the direction of Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, recently released the results of tests of 15 kinds of spackle that had been purchased in New York City. Five were found to contain appreciable amounts of asbestos. (Some of the samples were duplicate brands bought at different times.)

According to Dr. Selikoff, the union of drywall Tapers and Pointers of Greater New York called his attention to the possibility that the spackle might contain asbestos. John Alfaroni, an official of the union, said some of the members became ill and were found to be suffering from asbestos-caused diseases.

As a result of Dr. Selikoff's findings, he said, his union members will no longer work with any spackle that contains asbestos, and will only sand the dried spackle if they are provided with masks. The asbestos in spackle is released into the air, according to Dr. Selikoff, when the dry forms are mixed with water to make a paste and when any form of spackle is sanded.

Long-Range Study

Dr. David Rall, director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, said it was doubtful that someone doing a small amount of spackling work at home was in any danger. But he said that someone redoing the walls of an entire house might be taking "an unnecessary risk." Extensive research on the results of long-range, low-level asbestos exposure is in progress, he said.

A spokesman for U.B. Gypsum, the manufacturer of one of the spackling brands found to contain asbestos, said the company was phasing out the production of spackle with asbestos. A spot check of several Manhattan paint stores found cans of U.S. Gypsum's Texolite, which contains from 6 to 10 per cent asbestos, still on the market. Also found was another U.S. Gypsum product called Durabond Paste Spackling, which was labeled "Caution: Contains asbestos fibers. Avoid creating dust. Breathing asbestos dust may cause serious bodily harm."

The other products found by Dr. Selikoff to contain asbestos were Perf A Tape, Metro and Arvon. The Perf A Tape was counted twice by Dr. Selikoff, because it was purchased and tested twice, once in 1972 or earlier,

and later in January, 1974. Products found to be without asbestos were Red Top, Muralo, Patch Paste, Schalk, U-G-L, Cerfex, Kex, New Kex, and Dap. Dr. Selikoff cautioned that the products on the market today might contain different ingredients.

Persons wishing to minimize any risk should use only pasta spackle and should wear a mask when sanding. Most labels on spackle products do not disclose the constituents that went into them.

Freezer Tests

Consumers Union, the non-profit organization that publishes Consumer Reports Magazine, tested six top-freezer models and 10 side-by-side models, all frost free, and found vast differences in energy consumption.

The top-freezer models used an average of 133 kilowatt hours a month, while the side-by-sides used 162 kilowatt hours, about 20 per cent more. The magazine noted that the side-by-sides provided slightly more space, but not 20 per cent more.

The one notable exception to these findings Philco was the sed only 115 kilowatt hours, making it as economical as the most frugal of the top-freezer types. (When others factors were taken into account, however, Consumers Union did not rate the Philco as the best buy.)

The models tested were all large, from 17 to 20 cubic feet. But the engineers at Consumers Union said that the same general principle—that the side-by-side use more electricity than top-freezer types—should apply to other sizes as well.

The engineers also had an energy-saving tip for people who already own refrigerators. Some models, they said, have a switch that makes it possible to turn off the anti-condensation heaters, which keep moisture off the exterior cabinet in humid weather. Turning that switch off could cut electricity usage by about 15 per cent. Consult your owner's manual for the location of the switch, if one exists.

Turning it off will cause condensation to form on the outside of the refrigerator, particularly in hot humid weather.

Consumer Booklet

Have you ever wondered which was the proper consumer protection agency to call when you have a problem? The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs has just released an updated version of a booklet that can end your quandry. Called "Tele-help," because it gives the phone numbers of the various agencies along with their addresses, it is available for 35 cents from Dr. Lilly Bruck, director of consumer education for the department, at 80 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10013.

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