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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor.—The scientific literature, with reference to clinical studies on dust exposures, would be of greater present and future value if the dust studied were thoroughly characterized and presented along with the clinical data. All too frequently the term "talc" has been used indiscriminately in the literature, without describing its purity and associated mineral content. In this regard, the recently published article by Fine, Peters, Burgess, and DiBerardinis, "Studies of Respiratory Morbidity in Rubber Workers: Part IV. Respiratory Morbidity in Talc Workers" (31: 195, 1976), relates rubber workers' pulmonary function data with exposure to dusting material, which is solely described as "industrial grade talc." However, nowhere in this publication is analytical information presented to define clearly the composition of this material called "industrial talc."

In this regard, one of the authors (W. A. Burgess) had provided me with a sample of this material. Semiquantitative x-ray diffraction analysis and quantitative carbonate analysis revealed that in fact it contained only about 42% mineral talc. The major portion consisted of 54% mixed carbonates (iron magnesium carbonate, dolomite, and a trace of calcite) with 3% chlorite and about 1% other minerals (phlogopite, rutile, muscovite). In conclusion, this article presents a morbidity study of rubber workers exposed to a mixed mineral dust that contains carbonates as a majority. Therefore, "talc" should not be singled out as

the principal mineral under study, and use of the term "talc workers" is misleading.

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To the Editor.—We agree with Dr. Rolle that the value of a scientific investigation of health effects of dust is enhanced by a careful chemical characterization of the dust. We regret any confusion that the use of the term "talc workers" caused.

However, the principal dust exposure of the rubber workers we studied was, in fact, industrial talc. The dust characterized by Dr. Rolle fulfills the standard definition of industrial talc. The term "industrial talc" has been defined as a mixture of minerals that meets certain physical requirements rather than one which has a fixed chemical composition.¹

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