

TORIAL

Three-year health survey findings announced



FINDINGS of a three-year survey into the health of present and former asbestos industry employees were announced to industry and union officials in the Thetford Mines City Hall late Tuesday. The medical team included, from left, Dr. J.C. McDonald, Dr. Margaret Becklake, Slavodan Duce, a Yugoslav observer, Dr. Alison McDonald and Mr. Graham Gibbs. In the research group but not in photo are Dr. Gisèle Fournier, from the University of Sherbrooke, and two statisticians.

Results of a three-year survey by a research team from the McGill University Medical Faculty of Montreal, the University of Quebec at Montreal, and the U.S. Public Health Service, were announced to industry and union officials in the Thetford Mines City Hall late Tuesday. The medical team included, from left, Dr. J.C. McDonald, Dr. Margaret Becklake, Slavodan Duce, a Yugoslav observer, Dr. Alison McDonald and Mr. Graham Gibbs. In the research group but not in photo are Dr. Gisèle Fournier, from the University of Sherbrooke, and two statisticians.

Headed by Dr. J.C. McDonald, of McGill University's Department of Epidemiology and Health, the international research team's investigations were aimed at assessing the risks of lung cancer to persons exposed to Canadian chrysotile asbestos. Another primary purpose was to review all aspects of the health of workers in Quebec's asbestos mines and mills to ensure that it is efficiently protected.

Preliminary findings of the

Seventy per cent of this group of employees belonged to the lowest dust exposure categories. They had little or no increased mortality from these diseases, he stated.

Number of cases small
"Two points must be emphasized," Dr. McDonald declared. "First, that the dust exposure experienced by these workers occurred many years ago when environmental conditions in the asbestos mills were poorly controlled, and, second, that the total number of respiratory diseases attributable to asbestos was very small."

Results to date indicated, Dr. McDonald continued, that at present levels of dust exposure in today's asbestos mills even 30 years employment would probably not carry any measurable risk of lung cancer.

Dr. McDonald then reported on the results of findings from surveys throughout Canada of deaths due to mesothelioma. During the 1960-68 period only 165 fatal cases had been recorded by pathologists throughout the entire country, he stated.

Field inquiries confirmed that in a minority of cases there was a definite history of having worked with asbestos, he declared. "Almost all the histories were of exposure in the manufacture and industrial application of the mineral, rather than in the production of asbestos fibre."

There was no increased number of cases whose contact was limited to residence in the neighborhood of asbestos mines or mills.



QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD followed the hour-long announcement of the findings, with topics ranging from the continuation of the health research program to new procedures for the periodic medical supervision of employees. Here C.J.M. haulage truck driver Edmond Delorme, vice-president of the Asbestos union, asks a question about health studies on younger employees.

The two sets of results, the epidemiologist noted, confirm the association between occupational exposure to asbestos and these two varieties of respiratory cancer. "The results are nevertheless encouraging," he said, "in that they suggest the risk is virtually confined to levels of dust exposure which are controllable, if not already controlled, in most Canadian asbestos mines and mills."

Members of the medical research team included Drs. Alison McDonald and J. Corbett McDonald, epidemiologists; Dr. Margaret Becklake, physiologist; Mr. Jack Siemiatycki, statistician; Mr. Graham Gibbs, environmental hygienist; Dr. Gisèle Fournier, physiologist at the University of Sherbrooke; and Mr. Charles Rossiter, statistician with the British Medical Research Council.

Research Program to Continue

In light of the researchers' findings, the program will continue.

ported, it has been decided to continue the research program with a further five years.

The extended research program into the health of Quebec's 6,000 asbestos workers will have these main objectives:

—To record and analyze deaths and their cause to enable the present approximate estimation of what constitutes a safe level of dust concentration to be more accurately defined.

—Close surveillance over the occurrence of suspected mesotheliomas in Canada, so as better to understand their cause. "Asbestos exposure has failed to explain most of them and is probably not the only factor when present," Dr. McDonald commented.

In collaboration with the industrial clinics in Thetford Mines and Asbestos, it is planned to introduce new procedures for the regular periodic medical supervision