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Conference on Biological
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CONFERENCE ON BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF ASBESTOS
New York Academy of Sciences
Section of Biological and Medical Sciences
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The Conference on the Biological Effects of Asbestos was held from Monday, October 19 through Wednesday, October 21 and was attended by some 200 medical authorities and pathologists, asbestos fiber authorities and air hygienists, from many countries throughout the world. Mr. Horowitz and I arrived in New York on Sunday afternoon, October 18, and immediately contacted certain of those members of Turner Brothers Asbestos Company who were in attendance representing the Asbestosis Research Council of England. Consideration was directed to the work of the Council and its intended participation in the work of this conference. Included in this group were: Dr. S. Holmes, Dr. J. F. Knox, Dr. Beatty and Mr. D. W. Mills. The seriousness of the problems involved are fully appreciated by everyone; however, the technological advancements that have been achieved through the efforts of this English association and the application of proper controls in the manufacturing areas have served to provide markedly improved conditions throughout the asbestos industry in that country. The Asbestosis Research Council was established in England in 1957 and the members have accomplished a great deal of good during the period since that time. It was felt by many that this meeting would serve as a medium for proclaiming and demonstrating some of these accomplishments. We contacted and talked with most of the members of this group as well as members of the Council representing Cape Asbestos and British Belting and Asbestos Ltd. who were present on several occasions throughout the week and are greatly impressed with their abilities and work.

The meeting, however, turned out to be different than had been expected as the original intent. In fact, a newspaper article that was carried a couple of weeks prior to this conference by several hundred newspapers in America and abroad, served to arouse our suspicions as to the true intent of this meeting and these suspicions were confirmed as the various discussions unfolded.

This conference was organized under the direction of Dr. Irvin J. Selikoff, Mount Sinai Hospital, who serves the Asbestos Workers of America, a trade union which covers principally those who work as insulators and ladders using asbestos insulation materials. The program was nearly two years in the making and was well planned and organized to promote the interests of Dr. Selikoff and the Union. The subjects covered ranged from the geology and physical and chemical properties of the several asbestiform minerals to such medical considerations as Pulmonary Asbestosis, Neoplasia and Mesothelial Tumors presumably resulting therefrom. Many areas throughout the world were covered from Quebec to South Africa and from Milan, Italy to ~~Florida~~.

There were many pathological discussions complete with photographic studies showing the asbestos fibers and asbestos dust bodies at the site of an abnormality in the lung and other organs of human and animal bodies. Tumorous growths were shown not only in animals but in men and women who had been autopsied and the evidence apparently served to prove that asbestos was the cause of the malady. The identifications were apparently true and were repeated and often duplicated by Pathologists from New York; London; Glamorgan, Wales; Johannesburg, South Africa; Belfast, etc.

To cite but a few of the cases and observations that were presented which are now in print and a matter of record and will require a refutation in kind, we offer the following:

- (1) One author stated that not only did the men who worked in the asbestos mines have asbestos bodies in various parts of their system but that the donkeys, the dogs and even the rats in the neighborhood were so afflicted.
- (2) Dr. Muriel Henhouse reported a case in England where a girl who up to the age of 5, resided near an asbestos factory but at that age moved away from that area. Twenty years later this girl developed a mesothelial tumor, induced by an identified asbestos body. Further, a playmate of this girl has been located in another part of the country and has been found to be suffering a similar fate.
- (3) Dr. Nagelschmidt reported that the amount of asbestos exposure in time and quantity is not necessarily the important factor. One or a very few asbestos bodies can serve as the mechanism for the development of a malady, and that an asbestos body may lay dormant in a human body many years before becoming active.

- (4) Dr. J. G. Thomson reported that the inhalation of asbestos fibers by urban dwellers is very similar in Capetown, S. Africa and in Miami, Florida. No less than 30% of the males and 20% of the females in 500 autopsies studied in both cities showed asbestos bodies. It was this gentleman who "speculated" that the asbestos contamination in the Miami air was induced by automobile brake lining disintegration.

We have submitted a collection of all of the abstracts of the papers delivered at this conference and a study of these alone serve to provide the underlying tone of the meetings. It is quite apparent that the whole affair was motivated and executed in the interest of the Asbestos Workers of America. The New York Academy of Science and many of the speakers, I feel, did not realize how they were being used until the session was underway. While it is an indictment of the dusty conditions of the asbestos insulator, and perhaps justifiably so, it also indicts the entire asbestos industry from the mine to the ultimate end product which contains asbestos. It occurred to me as the conference developed that the role of asbestos as it affects the lung and pulmonary functions of that area of the human body was being given less attention and a greater emphasis placed on the carcinogenic effect of asbestos fibers. Cancer of the lung, stomach and various other locations throughout the human body were cited and the relationship of asbestos exposure and actual asbestos fiber inclusions were identified in those areas. In this connection the entrance of asbestos fibers into the body not only through breathing and the nose, but by ingestion through the mouth as well was given attention.

Discussions with Dr. Gaze and Robert Cryer of Cape Asbestos; Mr. Woodrooffe, Canadian Bureau of Mines; Mr. Hough and Dr. Kenneth Smith of Johns-Manville Corp; the several members of the Turner Brothers Asbestos Company delegation and with many others concerned with the serious implications here involved would indicate that the asbestos industry should take some positive actions to clarify the truths and to correct any untruths that may have been presented. A dispassionate appraisal of the contents of each paper here presented must be made and an evaluation and a differentiation be made between the fact and fiction. The Asbestos Research Council has been engaged in this work for many years and has made good progress both in the medical as well as the dust control areas of concern. This experience could well serve as a basis for and perhaps the initiation of considerations related to the problems at hand.

I personally feel that in this country the asbestos textile industry has much more at stake in this problem than do those in the A/C business and would imagine that some organized effort in this regard by that segment of the industry will be forthcoming. Certain-teeed must, of course, make every effort to provide maximum safety and minimum dust count conditions in the manufacturing operations; however, it seems to me that the effects of any adverse publicity in this regard will be felt more potently in our sales effort. The implication that asbestos fibers may be placed in the air and serve as a pollutant as a result of asbestos-bearing brake linings disintegrating, or asbestos-bearing floor tile being disintegrated, might just as easily be extended to imply that A/C pipe may release a few fibers that could be water borne and ingested by a human being.

To combat this sort of publicity, the overall industry will have to combine forces and establish a case history record file that will disprove such claims. It seems to me that it is beyond the financial and personnel capabilities of any one company to tackle such a problem alone. We should rely on the work that has been established and proven thus far and cooperate with allied industrial interests along those lines that are legally, logically, and morally open to us.