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WILLIAM S BARTON
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Environment Pictured as Cancer Cause

Maryland Scientist Addresses Border Public Health Group

BY WILLIAM S. BARTON

Many types of cancer are caused by a great variety of environmental factors, it was disclosed yesterday to 300 health officials at the United States-Mexico Border Public Health Association's meeting in the Alaxandria.

Dr. W. C. Hueper of the National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Md., declared that the study of the environment as a cause of cancer has been neglected until now.

Few Causes Listed

One reason for this neglect, he said, is that investigators have been bewitched by "relatively fruitless" attempts to pin down the cause of cancer to heredity, old age, chronic irritation and specific infectious agents.

A few of the many environmental cancer causes listed include climate, exposure to certain chemicals, fumes, additives to foods and even certain medical preparations and cosmetics.

"Because," the national authority asserted, "long periods preceding the manifestation of environmental cancers may separate the original exposure and the illness by 5 to 40 years, these studies are difficult.

"But there is now a rapidly growing mass of indisputable evidence about the significant role of environmental agents in causing cancer in man."

Charts Displayed

The speaker displayed charts which indicate that continued exposure to benzene, soot, shale oil, tar oil, certain petroleum oils, arsenicals and asbestos dust can cause cancer. The cancers thus caused, he said, range from superficial skin cancer to cancers of the bladder, lungs and nasal passages.

Cancer of the bones, according to the chart, can be caused by prolonged exposure to radioactive chemicals. Also, cancer of the skin may follow overdoses of X rays, ultraviolet radiation and sunlight.

A separate table dislayed by the Maryland scientist lists such hobbies and home activities as gardening and painting as potential causes. In gardening, too much close exposure to arsenicals and other chemical insecticides are suspected in cancer of the skin and internal organs.

Paints Suspected

Use of paints and paint removers containing benzol, chrome pigments, asphalts and carbon blacks, it was reported, may cause leukemia and lung malignancies. Iodine deficiencies in food may cause cancer of the thyroid. And Vitamin B complex deficiencies and lack of protein combine to cause cancer of the liver.

Heated mineral oil as a fat substitute in baked foods is suspected as a potential cause of cancer in various internal organs. Moreover, impure aniline dyes in lipsticks may produce cancer of the bladder. Parasitic infections, says the authority, may give rise to cancers of the bladder, liver and intestines.

"It is evident from these charts," Dr. Hueper declared, "that environmental causes of cancer are important to all regions. The mining and smelting of arsenic containing silver and copper ores are cancer hazards. Even the use of coal tar paints for coating pipes carries some danger.

Time of Exposure

"Environmental cancers are essentially preventable diseases; diseases deserving the serious attention of public health agencies throughout the world.

"Control depends upon an effective decrease in the time of exposure to cancer-producing agents. If time of exposure is decreased it may take the cancer so long to develop that it exceeds a normal human lifetime."

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