

City Orders Firm to Control 'Snow' in Midcity

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Of The Bulletin Staff

The city's Health Department has ordered a New York contractor to submit plans for controlling asbestos fallout which has been "snowing" down on center city since spring.

The asbestos is sprayed on steel beams for insulation. Recent research has shown that

breathing asbestos increases the risk of lung cancer, city health officials said.

Large flakes of asbestos have been drifting down from the 36-story Central Penn National Bank Building — 5 Penn Center — since spring. The building is now being constructed at 16th and Market sts. Numerous complaints have been received by the city concerning the flakes since the project started to be applied in the spring.

Controls Sought
Dr. Norman R. Ingraham, health commissioner said his agency has asked for stricter control because of the possible danger to passersby and workers.

Venzie Corp., 1000 E. Mermaid lane, is applying the fire-

proofing substance under contract from Uris Buildings Corp., of New York City, general contractors for the building. A Venzie spokesman said that major spraying of the beams has been completed, and only patching work is now being done.

Venzie is scheduled to begin applying asbestos fireproofing within the next six weeks on the 35-story Fidelity Mutual Life Building at 16th st. and S. Penn Square, across from City Hall. Turner Construction Co. is the general contractor.

Improvement Noted

Edward Wilson, assistant commissioner for the city's Air Management Services, said his department has been working with officials of the Venzie firm to better control the fallout.

"They have been cooperative and improved their performance," Wilson said, "but on windy days the flakes really

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comes down and pile up on the street."

Wilson said one of the methods used to control the fallout has been to erect a tarpaulin around the area to be sprayed, but strong winds on the higher floors have been tearing the material.

He also said that the firm has a high turnover of employees and it takes time for them to become accustomed to applying the material.

Once the beams are sprayed, they are covered with several inches of plaster.

Cooperative Effort

Wilson said his department is cooperating with the health department of New York City to determine just what the danger levels are, for asbestos particles in the air.

William Reilly, assistant chief of Occupational and Radiological Health, agreed that health officials are concerned over what level of exposure to asbestos can be harmful.

"The problem is that recent medical evidence has shown that asbestos, in addition to being an industrial health problem, can cause cancer of the lung in addition to asbestosis.

"But the researchers don't know what level of exposure can be harmful. We're currently conducting research to try and determine what those levels are or how serious a problem it can be."

Reilly said that men working with asbestos have to wear special protective clothing and breathing apparatus.

Health officials have been studying the report of Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, of Mt. Sinai Hospital and School of Medicine in New York City. Dr. Selikoff, in his studies, showed a close statistical association between exposure of workers to asbestos and the development of a particular cancer, Mesothelioma. This type of cancer is said to be extremely rare, except in asbestos workers.



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"If I were grading them I'd give them A for effort. They tried. They had trouble getting the money... and technical problems involved. On the other hand, there's a very, very large component of the real-estate industry in the private sector that made no effort. First they said our law was unconstitutional. We had to test that, and it was held to be constitutional."

"I think the principal disappointment was that a large segment of the real-estate industry has chosen to hide behind legal technicalities."

"And there are still some other unresolved questions which the courts are going to have to decide. Until they do, we simply can't expect the kind of compliance with Local Law 14 that I think we're entitled to."

Eisenbud did say that about 10 per cent of the incinerators had been upgraded.

"No question but that we would have liked to have done more than we have, but I think we tried

hard. There have been some failures but in general there has been good progress."

The state and federal governments have been moving with increasing vigor into the air pollution problem.

The first federal program, in 1955, authorized the Public Health Service to conduct research and give state and local governments technical help. In a 1960 amendment a special study of motor-vehicle pollution was called for. And the Clean Air Act of 1963 broadened the scope by authorizing federal grants-in-aid directly to state and local air-pollution control agencies and expanded the PHS's role in research, training, and assistance.

The Air Quality Act of 1967 directed the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare to designate air-quality control areas crossing state lines and set up the National Center for Air Pollution Control to develop air-quality criteria.

Federal funds for air-pollution-control programs rose from \$2 million in 1955 to \$74 million for fiscal 1969.

The first state law dealing with air pollution was passed 16 years ago by New Jersey but New York has been among the leaders since. The Clean Air Act encourages the formation of interstate compacts. New York, Connecticut and New Jersey formed one such which is farther along than others.

New York State has also made important progress in the area of carbon monoxide fumes; any car registered in this state and manufactured no earlier than June 30, 1963, must by law be equipped with a crank-case-ventilating system approved by the State Health Commissioner. And every motor vehicle manufactured after June 30, 1967, and registered in the state must be equipped with an air-contamination-emission control system approved by the state.

The problem of air pollution, despite the programs now under way, is far from solved.

Opinions differ, for example, on just how well the battle is going. Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D-Wis.) has accused the federal government of "13 years of inefficiency" in combating air pollution. Congress from 1955 to 1968 appropriated \$121 million for an air-pollution research and development program, but Reuss points out it took that long simply to organize the research and development work on sulphur oxides.

Glenn L. Paulson, co-chairman of the New York Scientists' Committee for Public Information, contends that in New York City "the only significant change for the better" so far has been Con Ed's changeover to 99 per-cent sulphur-free fuel.

Clingman questions the accuracy of the city's figures on how much reduction of pollutants there's been. Whatever the reduction at the top of a smokestack at 300 feet, he says, "it's a question of what gets down to nose level."

And there are other question marks, such as the possible delayed effects of asbestos particles in the air from disintegration of brake linings, floor tiles, roofing, and insulation. Asbestos has been associated with lung cancer. A study of the problem is now underway here.

"We have to take a certain amount of risk," says Arnold Risman, State Health Dept. associate air-pollution-control engineer, "but take asbestos, where we don't know the risk. For example, we're not going to eliminate the N. Y. State Thruway because of accidents, since we want to travel. On the other hand, if there are too many accidents, we should have research and either shut it down or correct the trouble."

Refuse disposal becomes a bigger headache every year. In 1920 an average of 2.75 pounds of waste was collected daily from each person in the country. Today it has grown to 5.3 pounds and is expected to reach 8 pounds per person by 1980. The alternative to burning it—thus polluting the air—is burying it, and we're running out of space.

Suggested long-range solutions of air pollution include electric cars; the complete banning of private automobiles from large cities, replacing them with adequate mass transportation; new uses of solar heat and atomic energy.

But all the plans and "all the laws from Washington to Albany are not going to mean anything," says Kenneth Kowald, executive secretary of New York State Action for Clean Air, "unless people are concerned. You have to face the realization that most aren't sufficiently concerned about life around them."

There is the cost too. As the Mayor's Task Force pointed out: "No one knows whether this program will cost New York City \$300 million or \$500 million... or the American people \$5 or \$10 billion to safeguard their environmental resources (but)... the price of neglect is infinitely higher."

Says Charles C. Johnson Jr., administrator of the U. S. Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Service: "Unless our nation learns and learns quickly to apply the scientific knowledge we have—and it will always be incomplete—to the problem of the environment, we are courting inevitable disaster."

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