

CHICAGO, Ill.
Tribune
3 775,414 -- S. 1,045,176
CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA

MAR 4 1971

2 Disagree on Dangers of Asbestos

BY CASHY MURO
[Environment Editor]

Two doctors gave conflicting testimony yesterday on the health effects of airborne asbestos fibers.

"Asbestos pollution is so severe in large cities that every person has potentially cancer-producing fibers in their lungs," Dr. Irving J. Selikoff testified before the City Council Committee on Environmental Control. Dr. Selikoff is head of the Division of Environmental Medicine at the New York City University Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Tells Asbestos Deaths

A study of 18,000 asbestos workers throughout the country since 1957 showed that one of every four or five deaths in the group was caused by lung cancer. Smokers who inhaled asbestos fibers ran a greater risk, he said. There have been 650 deaths in the group.

Major sources of asbestos in air in cities occurs when asbestos insulation is being sprayed on and during demolition of buildings that have asbestos insulation on their walls, he said.

Doubts Public Peril

Dr. Fred Pundsack, speaking for the Asbestos Information Association, said asbestos poses some health risks to workers exposed to it for long periods, but "there has never been a recorded instance of anyone in the general public being affected by asbestos."

When asbestos fibers are inhaled, they remain in the lungs, said Dr. Selikoff. If men in the asbestos industry are not protected they run serious risks, he said.

Dr. Selikoff called for laws and regulations requiring precautions in the use of asbestos.

The asbestos industry wholeheartedly supports the enactment of regulations designed to protect spray and other construction employees from exposure to potentially hazardous amounts of asbestos or any other form of dust in their work and also supports efforts to reduce or eliminate the nuisance of small amounts of dust being allowed to escape into the community air," said Dr. Pundsack, who is vice president of research and development for Johns-Manville Corp.

Dr. Pundsack said the industry is opposed to a ban on asbestos spray insulation on the grounds of health hazards. He said asbestos is valuable as a fire retardant.

'Lungs filled with asbestos'

By Jay McMullen

Every person in America's big cities now has asbestos fibers in the lungs, Chicago aldermen were warned Wednesday.

The statement came from Dr. Irving Selikoff, the nation's leading expert on asbestos pollution.

Scientists have warned there are strong indications that asbestos particles could cause lung cancer. Such particles are carried in city air.

SELKOFF SAID the presence of asbestos fibers in lungs does not mean everyone in big cities will die of lung cancer. But he added that 20 to 25 per cent of deaths among U.S. asbestos workers since 1957 have been attributed to lung cancer, with another 26 per cent dying of asbestosis or cancer of the colon or stomach.

Asbestosis is a lung ailment that results in extreme shortness of breath.

SELKOFF SAID most asbestos in city air comes from sprayed-on insulation materials, demolition of buildings that have asbestos materials in the walls, and asbestos factories.

Selikoff also reported that "a combination of cigarettes and asbestos has a very strong multiplying effect" in the human body.

Council unit told asbestos

Construction workers get lung cancer from inhaling asbestos and all city dwellers inhale some of the fibrous mineral, a City Council committee was told Wednesday.

Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, a New York physician and biological scientist, testified at the Committee on Environmental Control hearings ordered by Mayor Daley on the hazards of asbestos.

Selikoff, director of environmental medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, urged that Chicago impose stringent controls on all uses of the material.

He testified that uncontrolled

From MAR 4 1971
SUN-TIMES
Chicago, Ill.
M-552,000 S-720,000

spraying of asbestos to fireproof new buildings poses a health "disaster" for construction workers.

The scientist said one death in every four or five among asbestos workers is caused by lung cancer.

Selikoff said the hazard to passersby at construction sites has not been determined, but studies he conducted for the federal government show that "everybody living in large cities has some asbestos in his lungs in small amounts."

Moreover, he said, bad effects of asbestos inhalation are typically not evident until some 25 years afterward.

He said any use that can't be controlled should be outlawed. Asbestos is used for insulating.

Dr. Fred L. Pundsack, vice president for research of Johns-Manville Corp. and spokesman of the Asbestos Information Assn., New York, said, "The asbestos industry wholeheartedly supports the enactment of regulations to protect workers."

"However," Pundsack said, "the industry is opposed to the complete banning of any useful material . . . on the unproven supposition that its application or use under proper operating conditions may present a health hazard to the general public."

PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT

CAP-1716

From MAR 4 1971
DAILY NEWS
Chicago, Ill.
L-463,000

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