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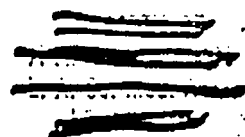
Silicosis and Asbestosis

BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

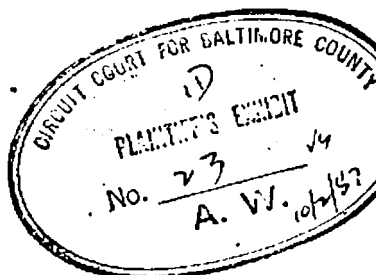
EDITED BY

A. J. LANZA, M.D.

ASSISTANT MEDICAL DIRECTOR, METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY;
CHAIRMAN, INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE COMMITTEE OF THE NEW YORK
TUBERCULOSIS AND HEALTH ASSOCIATION



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VII. PUBLIC HEALTH AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS UNITED STATES

A. J. LANZA, M.D.

ASSISTANT MEDICAL DIRECTOR
METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

INTRODUCTION

THE occupational diseases and the health of industrial workers present one of the important phases of public health. Of the occupational diseases, none is more truly occupational than the pulmonary diseases due to the inhalation of industrial dusts. Lead, carbon monoxide, arsenic, benzol and many other toxic substances associated with industrial processes are also found in circumstances that have no connection with industry. The same cannot be said for the pneumoconioses. They stand as the most perfect type of occupational diseases. Recognized for centuries, only in comparatively recent times have their wide-spread effects been disclosed and their importance to the public health appreciated. More lately still, the inclusion of these disorders in schemes of compensation for occupational disease has emphasized their economic importance and the necessity for thorough and adequate methods for their control.

SILICOSIS AND COMPENSATION

Silicosis and asbestosis burst upon the amazed consciousness of American industry during the period 1929-1930. Previously, the terms "silicosis", "asbestosis", "pneumoconiosis", were practically unknown to industrialists except that in the hard rock mining industry, silicosis, under its various colloquial designations, was well recognized. Knowledge of these

conditions was limited to the small number of those whose investigations of pulmonary dust diseases had made them conversant with the subject.

Arising out of the period of economic depression, the situation with respect to silicosis and asbestosis became manifest as a medico-legal phenomenon of a scope and intensity that was at once preposterous and almost unbelievable. Damage suits, under the common law, were instituted against employers by employees, alleging pulmonary dust diseases, in industrial centers all over the United States, to an amount in excess of 100,000,000 dollars. To understand this situation, both in its economic and public health aspects, it is necessary to review not only the history of silicosis investigations in the United States but also the status of compensation for occupational diseases in the various States.

The reader is referred to the first chapter of this book. Briefly, governmental agencies began studies of silicosis in the mining industry in 1914 and these were carried on until they were interrupted by the entry of the United States into the World War. These studies had for their purpose the detection of silicosis, the extent and severity of the disease in the areas studied and the establishment of methods of control. The question of compensation did not arise, which must seem strange to the non-American student of the subject.

In almost every State of the Union, there is a State Department of Labor and Industry. These State Departments are charged with the administration of the laws pertaining to factories, mines, and workshops. Previous to 1930 only 3 or 4 Labor Departments included in their activities a division of industrial hygiene and these few were not established on a basis that made possible original studies or research. They were mostly concerned with routine inspections and also endeavored to enforce laws and regulations pertaining to

health, whose vague wording often made them almost non-enforceable.

The State Departments of Health, although their functions might be thought to embrace public health in industry, uniformly ignored the subject altogether, with the exception of Ohio and Connecticut, where occupational diseases were made reportable. Following the widespread national attention focussed upon occupational diseases by the silicosis furor, this situation has entirely changed and at present (1937) State Divisions of Industrial Hygiene are, with a few exceptions, located in the State Departments of Health.

The Federal Government embraces several agencies that concern themselves with occupational diseases and industrial hygiene. In the United States Department of Labor, the Bureau of Vital Statistics has been actively engaged in the field of investigation. In the United States Public Health Service, the Office of Industrial Hygiene and Sanitation has likewise been engaged in industrial studies and at the request of and in co-operation with the United States Bureau of Mines investigated dust diseases. These governmental departments have jurisdiction in industrial establishments of a governmental nature only, except that by virtue of recent legislation, the United States Department of Labor may supervise conditions under which work is done under a contract with the Federal Government. The Government officers enter a mine or a factory only with the permission of the owners and usually at their request. The Federal officials have no power to enforce existing State laws nor to initiate new laws or regulations. Reports of silicosis investigations, when published by the department responsible, might and did contain suggested methods for the prevention and control of this disease but they were addressed not to the State authorities nor to the industrialist but to the general public as contributions to the