

DMS
BF-46

March 5, 1973

Ms. Marjorie Briggs, R.N.
Inservice Education Coordinator
Edgemoor Geriatric Hospital
North Edgemoor Drive
Santee, California 92071

Dear Ms. Briggs:

Your letter of February 6, 1973 to the attention of the Food and Drug Administration has been referred to me for reply. We are at present compiling information on various talc products, but this is not yet ready for release.

Inhalation of large amounts of asbestos, as in occupational exposure, is known to increase the incidence of lung cancer and mesothelioma, especially in heavy smokers of cigarettes. Asbestos is often found as a natural contaminant of talc; both are magnesium silicates, and are geochemically interconvertible.

Talcosis is seen only under conditions of heavy exposure and talc has not been demonstrated of itself to be carcinogenic. The levels of the various types of asbestos found in talc vary depending upon the source from which the talc comes and the use for which it is intended, i.e. use in heavy industry, food ingredient, cosmetic. Generally, the better grades of cosmetic and food talcs are reportedly free of asbestos. Needless to say, the suppliers and commercial users of talc are aware of the potential problems presented and in the last year or so the industry has made an effort to reduce or eliminate asbestos in talc as required. Two statements from a 1971 report on Asbestos by the National Academy of Sciences are of interest "... there are levels of asbestos exposure that will not be associated with any detectable risk. What those levels are is not known but there is no evidence that persons in the general population have any increased risk of neoplasm At present, there is no evidence that the small numbers of fibers found in most members of the general population affect health or longevity." Countless infants throughout the Western world have been liberally dusted with all types of talcum powders under all conditions of use and ventilation now for several generations without any demonstrated related increase in neoplasms. On the basis of present

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knowledge, therefore, normal use of good grade talcum powder under conditions of adequate ventilation should pose no problem. Of course, one should avoid the inhalation of any foreign material, including talcum powder.

Sincerely yours,

George E. Thompson, Ph.D.
Assistant to the Director
Division of Colors and Cosmetics Technol
Office of Product Technology

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