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High Rate of Cancer Noted Among Smokers In Asbestos Industry

Combination of Asbestos Dust,
Cigaretts Poses Great Risk
Of Lung Cancer, Study Shows

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

ATLANTIC CITY — Asbestos workers who smoke cigarettes have a ninetyfold greater risk of dying of lung cancer than persons who neither smoke nor work around asbestos, three New York medical researchers said.

The extremely high risk of lung cancer among persons exposed to the combination of asbestos dust and cigaret smoke was uncovered in a study of 370 members of the Newark, N.J., and New York locals of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers union. The men are primarily involved in installing asbestos insulation in construction work.

The workers were exposed to a greater amount of asbestos dust than the general population, and all had been occupationally exposed to it for at least 20 years. But the researchers added that the general population, particularly in big-city areas, is exposed to a slight amount of such particles. As a result, they said, it is important to determine whether cigaret smoking makes this light exposure more hazardous than it would be otherwise.

In a report to the scientific session of the American Medical Association's annual convention here, the researchers said there were 94 deaths among the insulation workers during a 32-month period. This, they calculated, was 48 more than would have been expected among a similar group of men who hadn't been chronically exposed to asbestos.

Most of the men who died — 78 — were cigaret smokers. And among the smokers, 26 died of lung cancer. No lung-cancer deaths occurred among those who didn't smoke.

Twenty-four lung-cancer deaths was an extremely high rate, the researchers calculated. Among a similar group of smokers who hadn't been exposed to asbestos, statisticians would expect only about three deaths from lung cancer, they said.

"If they had neither smoked nor been exposed to asbestos dust," they said, the ex-

pected number of lung-cancer deaths would have been one or none during the 32-month period.

"All people incur a great increase in risk of lung cancer if they smoke cigarettes; for asbestos workers the increase in risk is tremendous," they said. The researchers noted that microscopic asbestos fibers, once inhaled, remain permanently in the lung tissues. As a result, "asbestos workers who don't smoke cigarettes should never begin. Those who do smoke should stop immediately."