PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT

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Fairless plant tested for cancer

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Asbestos fibers from pipe wrappings and brake linings could cause lung cancer in workers and retirees of U.S. Steel's Fairless Works.

One Fairless Hills man, a 22-year worker who handled asbestos at the Falls Township plant, has won a settlement from the corporation after cancer claimed part of one lung.

And a federal agency and the large local steelworkers' union are probing the asbestos level and employee health at the mill.

A Fairless Works spokesman denies workers' health is threatened, saying, "We take the necessary steps to make sure our people are protected." And he says the former steelworker's illness is not related to asbestos poisoning.

Asbestos, a known cause of cancer and other respiratory disorders, has been used in Fairless Works since the plant was built in the early 1950s.

An asbestos tape is wrapped around steam pipes throughout the plant, workers say. And the substance is contained in brake linings on cranes, they add.

Workers are safe as long as the asbestos in the tape and brake linings remains intact, says Dr. William J. Nicholson of the Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York City.

But once the asbestos breaks into microscopic fibers and becomes airborne, it challenges workers' health.

"Dismantling of pipes wrapped with asbestos can cause high concentrations (of fibers)," Nicholson says. "Usually the asbestos pipe wrapping is covered by canvas, paint or metal.

Such outer coatings do not exist in the plant, workers claim.

"There used to be a coat of black paint on the pipes, but that chipped when cranes hit them," a worker recalls. "It (the paint) has peeled off—it's a long time since they were black."

The plant spokesman responds the asbestos insulation is covered. And when the pipes are repaired, "steps are taken to protect the worker as the law specifies to keep exposure to a minimum."

Another worker says brake linings are cleaned with an air gun, which "blows the asbestos onto the floor. It just sits there in the dirt and grease.

Nicholson describes the same procedure as common practice in cases where asbestos poisoning has been found. His staff at Mt. Sinai's environmental laboratory, headed by Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, is considered the pioneer and authority on the cancer causing agent.

Vacuum cleaning

Nicholson adds the brake linings should be cleaned with a vacuum or wet cloth to keep asbestos particles from becoming airborne.

The plant spokesman says wet cloths are used, and pre-drilled brake shoes are bought as another precaution. (Without the drill holes, workers would have to drill through the asbestos shoes, resulting in asbestos particles.)

The chilling characteristic of asbestos poisoning, Nicholson says, is a 20- to 30-year dormancy period. In other words, workers inhaling the cancer-causing fibers would not suffer from the disease and could not detect it for two to three decades.

"The lower the exposure, the lower the risk. The higher the exposure, the higher the risk," Nicholson says. "We don't know the threshhold for asbestos (how long a worker must be exposed to fibers to contract cancer), so the best thing is to eliminate it."

Dormancy period

It is the dormancy period which worries local 4889 officials.

"It takes 20 to 30 years for the asbestos to show up and affect people. The plant opened in 1952 (27 years ago)" officials say. "Men who worked in the plant all their lives and who have retired could have it (lung cancer)."

"The best thing to do is get a checkup," they add.

The local did send 26 workers from the sheet and tin division and 40 men from central shops to local doctors for X-rays. Only four of these cases, examined three months ago resulted in "abnormal" X-rays and required more tests, says Al Lupini, Local 4889 president.

But one of the doctors—Dr. Solomon Kominsky of Rolling Lane, Red Cedar Hill, Levittown—says asbestos poisoning may not show up on one-dimensional X-rays. Other tests would be needed, he adds.

Kominsky refuses to discuss the steelworkers' cases he has handled, citing the confidential doctor-patient relationship.

Results of the supplemental tests in the four "abnormal" cases are not ready, Lupini adds.

Warns against panic

The local president is leery to start a "panic" among his 6,500 members, other plant workers and former employees. Yet an operation costing a man's lung and the ensuing settlement with management are making Lupini wonder how serious the situation could be.

The worker—a turbine mechanic whose name the Bucks County Courier Times is withholding at his request—recently consulted a specialist, who found lung cancer. After the operation, the victim's lawyer prepared a claim against U.S. Steel, only to receive an offer to settle out of court.

"That was a rare reaction," Lupini says of the corporation's quick offer. "Usually they tell us it (the ailment) is emphysema (and is not job related)."

The plant spokesman denies the victim's illness is related to asbestos poisoning. He calls the settlement a "workmen's compensation matter."

The settlement provides the disabled worker $213 a week. It also acknowledges his disability was caused by an "industrial disease," Lupini says.

"I feel sorry for the man," the local president adds. "But this is a breakthrough in industrial disease."

To guage the asbestos problem, Lupini called in the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, known as OSHA.

Air samples

OSHA investigators sampled air throughout the plant about six weeks ago, says Walter Wilson, director of the Philadelphia office. Results will be compiled within 60 days, he adds.

OSHA's limit as established by the federal Environmental Protection Agency is two fibers of asbestos per cubic centimeter of air within eight hours. But a scientist at Franklin Institute in Philadelphia calls OSHA's standards and detection techniques outdated.

Dr. Victor Damiano says OSHA's guidelines were established from research in asbestos plants only, not other types of manufacturing. Air samples are taken, and the number of fibers are counted.

This procedure is accurate for an asbestos plant, where all fibers would be asbestos, Damiano explains. But in a steel plant, the fibers collected cannot be distinguished.

Franklin Institute does have two types of electron microscopes to sort out fibers. But OSHA investigators use a more primitive light microscope which cannot show the difference between fibers, Damiano says.

"OSHA has dragged its feet," the scientist criticizes. "It doesn't have ambient air specifications. There has been trouble in schools, but it (OSHA) has no figures for school kids (to be subjected to asbestos)."

Damiano points out the Philadelphia School District has established limits more stringent than OSHA's.

The Franklin Institute does private analyses, such as the study it did for the Neshaminy School District in 1977. That study gave the district a clean bill of health after asbestos ceilings had been painted to cut down fibers in the air.