

Dr. William J. McConnell To Retire—

Metropolitan Life Executive An Outstanding Authority On Occupational Working Hazards; Got Legion Of Merit From War Department.

Dr. William J. McConnell, director of the safety and occupational health bureau of Metropolitan Life's health and welfare division and associate medical director of that company, is retiring at the end of the year after being with Metropolitan 27 years.

In a country which is the international leader in industry, which has more mines, factories and other places where raw material is processed than any other nation, he is regarded as an outstanding authority on industrial hygiene. Sometimes he has been designated as a man who has dedicated his life to helping detect, explore and successfully reduce the hazards of employment. The surveys and studies which he has conducted, either for the Government, the Army's medical service, private industry or for Metropolitan Life, together with his work in relation to safety measures which have been adopted, have been an important factor in helping cut down fatalities caused by occupational diseases. For instance, his participation in combating silicosis (dust particles in mines and plants which have resulted in many occupational diseases, some fatal), is widely recognized.

Handling of Explosives in Mined Plants

The work of Col. McConnell as chief, industrial hygiene branch, safety and security division, Office of Chief of Ordnance, was so highly regarded by the War Department that he was awarded the Legion of Merit.

As the direct representative of the Surgeon General, Col. McConnell was charged with the development and supervision of a comprehensive program to prevent general illness and occupational disease and to promote maximum health and efficiency among civilian employees engaged in Ordnance establishments throughout the United States. One of the biggest problems was poisoning from handling of explosives, particularly TNT.

In reading the citation Colonel Crosby Field, assistant safety director Office Chief of Ordnance said:

"Colonel McConnell's assignment was of great import inasmuch as these installations were fraught with dangers of various toxic exposures requiring constant surveillance and control. He launched into an aggressive program with unusual energy, foresight, perspicacity and comprehension, successfully reducing disabling illness from toxic explosives to an insignificant level, thereby insuring full utilization of available power for ammunition production."

Drop in Number of Fatalities

During World War I the U.S. facilities which produced 40% of the military explosives, used by the Allies, reported a ratio of 230 fatalities for every billion pounds of explosives manufactured. In World War II the Government-owned, contractor-operated plants produced 95% of all U.S. manufactured military explosives, and the number of fatalities

suffered for each billion pounds of explosives produced had been cut down to five. Colonel Field continued: "It is believed that this is the first large-scale demonstration of what can be accomplished in a large industry offering many serious health and accident hazards by a vigorous industrial hygiene and safety program."

Dr. McConnell is the author of a series of research studies on high temperature and numerous articles on industrial health subjects published in the Bulletin of the U.S. Public Health Service, United States Bureau of Mines, Proceedings of American Heating and Ventilating Society and other health publications devoted to industry. Also he is a contributor to Cecil's Textbook on Medicine, Lanza and Goldberg's Textbook on Industrial Hygiene; and Conn's Textbook on Current Therapy.

His Career

Born in Pittsburgh Dr. McConnell attended high school there and then went to St. Louis University where he was graduated in 1914 with a B.S. degree at the college and an M.D. degree from its medical school. His internship was at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh. Receiving a reserve commission in the Army Medical Corps he saw service on the Mexican border in 1916 and then helped organize and became medical officer of the 36th Infantry regiment.

Dr. McConnell in 1919 went with the Industrial Hygiene Department of the

United States Public Health Service and later was with the United States Bureau of Mines where he conducted industrial health surveys, research studies into the physiological effects of high temperatures and various humidities, carbon monoxide and the relation of various dusts to silicosis and tuberculosis. While engaged in these studies at the Bureau of Mines experimentation station at Pittsburgh he was appointed lecturer in industrial hygiene at University of Pittsburgh Medical School. Other industry affiliations of his were with Philadelphia Health Council, General Electric Co. and Budd Manufacturing Wheel Co.

Studies Conducted for Metropolitan

Dr. McConnell joined Metropolitan Life in 1929 when Lee K. Frankel was vice president in charge of the company's health and welfare operations. His first work, however, was with the company's Policyholders Service Bureau.

For the Metropolitan Life Dr. McConnell has conducted a number of industrial hygiene investigations of the pioneer variety. Among them were the study of silicosis in the foundry industry; of asbestosis (a microscopic dust which produces an inflammatory condition of the lungs) in the asbestos industry; and an inquiry into leather industry hazards.

When this country entered World War II Dr. McConnell obtained a leave of absence from Metropolitan Life and again served in the Army Medical



DR. WILLIAM J. McCONNELL

Corps. As a representative of the Surgeon General he was assigned to the safety division of the chief of Ordnance to direct the Ordnance Hygiene program. He advanced through the various grades to colonel, medical corps, and in 1945 was awarded the Legion of Merit for the services explained earlier in this article.

Active in Many Organizations

Some activities of Dr. McConnell in associations of which he is, or has been, a member, in part follow:

American Public Health Association: committee on atmospheric comfort and appraisal of industrial health.

American Public Health Association: chairman of committee on appraisal of industrial health services; and committee on atmospheric comfort.

American Society of Heating and Ventilating Engineers: committees having to do with air conditioned spaces.

American Standards Association: toxic dusts and industrial sanitation in manufacturing establishments committees.

American Welding Society: Safety recommendations and medical advisory committee.

Federal Civil Defense Administration: part-time consultant of division of special weapons.

Home Office Safety Committee: consultant to home office buildings division with respect to employee complaints on lighting, ventilation and possible exposure to toxic substances.

New York State Department of Labor: committees having to do with rules relating to control of silica dust in stone crushing operations and revision of industrial code relating to control of dusts, gases and fumes.

U.S. Army: consultant to the Surgeon General. He has also been on committees of National Association of Manufacturers and National Fund for Medical Education.

Has Prepared Many Papers

Some papers written by Dr. McConnell in collaboration with others in part follow:

Lead poisoning in the pottery trades; physiological effects of high temperatures and humidities; the industrial physician and the qualifications essential to his success; carbon-monoxide poisoning; health through industrial service; exhaust gases from engines using ethyl gasoline; methods of enumerating bacteria in air; ventilation standards, practical suggestions for nurses in industry; health of bank workers. In all there have been 60 papers on subjects such as these which he prepared himself or in collaboration with others.

For the past 20 years Dr. McConnell has been an associate professor in industrial hygiene, management department, School of Commerce of New York University. A bachelor, his hobbies are dogs and he has owned a large number of them over the years.



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