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Office Memorandum •

MONTANA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

TO : Mr. Bleich

DATE: March 31, 1966

FROM : Benjamin F. Wake

SUBJECT :

We thought you might be interested in this.

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punitive damages and $17,500 in compensatory damages for safety claims involving Richardson-Merrell's antichlesterol drug, Mer/29. Lawyers coordinating these claims estimate that the total punitive damages against Richardson-Merrell may amount to more than $60 million, and that total damage claims against the company may reach as high as $355 million. Meanwhile, cases still in the offing against companies in other industries are being pursued actively by cooperating trial attornies. These attorneys speculate that some of the claims could easily rival the projected figures in the Richardson-Merrell case.

ASBESTOS UNDER SCRUTINY

Grants totalling $324,000 have been awarded to Dr. Irving J. Selikoff at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City for the study of the health hazards of airborne mineral dusts. The grants will be used to support the hospital's new environmental health laboratory, headed by Dr. Selikoff.

The new facility has already begun a 3-year study of the dangers of asbestos dust. In this study, the lung tissue of up to 4,000 persons who are expected to die at Mt. Sinai and other hospitals during this period will be examined for traces of asbestos fiber. In addition, investigators will look for the correlations between causes of death and the presence of asbestos fiber in lung tissue, and will determine the occupational histories of the deceased and their relatives, as well as other pertinent background.

Asbestos-Cancer Link Studied

Previous research by Dr. Selikoff, Dr. Churg and Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond, the American Cancer Society, has shown high rate of cancer among New York City asbestos insulation workers. The research team has been studying a union group of insulation workers with twenty or more years of exposure to asbestos dust. They found six to seven times the "expected" rate of cancer of the lung and three times the normal rate of cancer of the stomach, colon and rectum. Mesothelioma, a form of cancer ordinarily so rare that it is not separately coded among causes of death, was found to have "extraordinarily high incidence" among asbestos workers.

A further consideration is that the exposure to asbestos dust does not need to be continuous for the link with cancer to be shown. Lungs of affected asbestos workers and others have been found to contain asbestos particles even after a ten, fifteen or twenty year gap in the apparent time of exposure. There also appears to be a latent period of about 20 years between initial exposure and the detection of cancer symptoms.

Mount Sinai researchers point out that, if the cancer-asbestos link is conclusive, the present incidence of asbestos-induced cancer is the outcome of exposure as long as twenty years ago when the world's asbestos production was 500,000 tons annually. Today's production is 3,500,000 tons annually, a seven-fold increase. Autopsy studies have shown asbestos fibres in the lungs of at least 25% of the general population, testifying to a widespread distribution of asbestos dust in our atmosphere. Asbestos is used chiefly in building construction as an insulation material.

Supporting Dr. Selikoff's view that asbestos dust is already a serious air pollutant, is the research conducted by Dr. Dzidra Cauna, pathologist at Presbyterian-University Hospital in Pittsburgh, and Dr. Robert S. Totten of the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine.

Dr. Selikoff's associates informed the Environmental Science Bulletin that they will conduct a thorough inventory of all mineral dusts in the lungs. Specialists at the Public Health Service feel that there is a crucial lack of baseline data in this area.

NEW STUDY SUGGESTS LINK BETWEEN PESTICIDES AND BIRTH DEFECTS

A possible relationship between pesticides and congenital defects in children was suggested in a case reported in the Feb. 21., 1966, issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. Dr. Fred Matthies, an investigator at St. Benedict's Hospital, Ogden, Utah, said the infant was born with anotia, facial paralysis, and cardiac anamaly, a combination of defects usually associated with the use of thalidomide by the mothers. The mother in this case, an agricultural worker, did not use thalidomide during the sensitive period of organogenesis, but did pick cotton daily

PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT