

Corrective Action On Talc Needed, U.S. Agency Says

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WASHINGTON — A government report has confirmed the need for "immediate corrective action" at the Gouverneur Talc Co. operations near Gouverneur, N.Y., to safeguard mine and mill workers from asbestos.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report said the content of the products analyzed "make it imperative that these talcs be labeled with the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) la-

bel" showing the product to contain asbestos.

The report was made available to The Times Washington Bureau under the Freedom of Information Act.

The R.T. Vanderbilt Co., which owns Gouverneur Talc, has maintained that its No. 1 mine and mill talc does not contain asbestos, although it labels comparable products from No. 3 mine and mill.

In the report — the final version of one made public a year ago — prepared by industrial hygiene experts John M. Dement and Ralph

D. Zumwalde, the government says "numerous operations in both the No. 1 mine and mill...have excessive exposures to airborne fibers."

"Analyses of both bulk talc samples and airborne dust samples...have shown that a majority of these fibers are asbestiform tremolite and anthophyllite...Immediate corrective actions to reduce exposures must be taken as recommended" in the report issued May 25, 1976.

Specific actions recommended by NIOSH include:

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— Evaluating mine ventilation with consideration for greater air volume and distribution and installation of water sprays at ore pockets.

— More emphasis on maintaining equipment in proper working order, since "numerous leaks were observed at material transfer points within the mill."

— Ventilation improvements at packing stations since local exhaust hoods are located too far from the filling spout to be effective and bursting bags, "a significant source of exposure," should be replaced with bags with greater bursting strength.

— Provision of respiratory protection for employees as specified in the OSHA asbestos standard until ventilation and work practice improvements are made and "asbestos fibers reduced to acceptable levels."

— Provisions for medical examinations specified in the OSHA asbestos standard.

In laying out the medical background for the report, NIOSH cited many studies, including a comparative study of workers exposed to talcs in St. Lawrence and Lewis Counties, N.Y. The St. Lawrence talc contained fibers, the Lewis County talc did not.

In St. Lawrence, a 1959 study showed, millers had nearly three times the fibrosis that those in Lewis did.

A follow-up study six years later made additional comparisons, and in most, but not all categories of chest problems, those exposed to fibrous talc were worse off.

The NIOSH report said that, while the medical studies cited showed presence of lung disease among tremolite talc miners in New York, they did not take into account the risk of cancer.

Two other studies, the report went on, "demonstrated an increased risk of cancer of the lung and pleura among these workers."

It said the study, by Dr. Morris Kleinfeld of Mt. Sinai in New York City, found 11 per cent of the deaths in the study resulting from malignancies of the lung or pleura, compared with the 3.2 per cent expected. A later study said respiratory cancer caused death in 12 per cent of the cases, but only 3.7 per cent had been expected.

Finnish studies have demonstrated "an excess cancer risk...among workers exposed to anthophyllite asbestos," NIOSH said.

The report repeated the finding a year ago that exposures to fibers in excess of ceilings allowed by OSHA and the Mine Enforcement Safety Administration (MESA) were found in nine work categories: Mine crushers operator, trammer, mine cageman, mill foreman, mill laborer, crushers operator, hardinge operator, wheeler operator and packer.

The NIOSH report said that Gouverneur Talc's No. 3 mill put out products with an OSHA asbestos warning label, though milling operations were "basically the same as those previously described for the No. 1 mill with minor variations. Dust control measures are not, however, as effective as those observed in the No. 1 mine and are being further improved."

The NIOSH study, conducted in November, 1975, was designed to clear up the conflict between reports the talc contained asbestos and Vanderbilt's certification they did not.

NIOSH analyses showed "significant contamination levels of both fibrous tremolite and fibrous anthophyllite," but there were arguments the studies were not appropriate since the mineral makeup of talc deposits in the area differed substantially from one to another.

That led to the NIOSH study on disease, death and industrial hygiene at Gouverneur Talc, which produces Nytal and other talcs. Vanderbilt argues do not contain asbestos.

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