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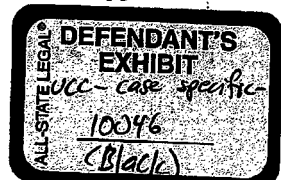


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Painters & Allied Trades Journal

On the Cover

To all IBPAT members and their families: Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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'Chemical Culprits' and Suffering

Last month, the *Painters Journal* reported on the National Joint Safety and Health Committee's discussion of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine health hazard study, "... 130 pages documenting the acute symptoms of over-exposure found among painters and allied tradesmen. ..."

This month begins the first in a five-part series designed to inform you about those "chemical culprits" found in the MSSM study, and the harms they can cause to you.

"The Background" is the first part of that series.

Next month: Identification of the culprits and the harms they cause.

The Mount Sinai School of Medicine health hazards study recently completed after nearly three years of work has exposed culprits responsible for death and suffering among the ranks of painters and allied tradesmen. The principal investigator for the NIOSH-funded project, Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, said the situation requires "urgent, detailed study, with appropriate corrective measures defined and instituted."

One tragic death reported in the study was that of a woodfinisher. For years he complained of chronic tiredness and weakness. As time passed, he experienced difficulty breathing; he developed high fevers, and he lost weight.

When he died at age 59, his autopsy showed him to have had pneumonia, pleuritis, hyperplasia of the lymph nodes, nephrosclerosis, arteriosclerosis and many other problems as deadly serious and harmful to him as their names were big and difficult to pronounce.

His was not a natural death.

For years, while he happily worked making and painting furniture, several companions of his trade slowly and subtly poisoned him, taking his health and 15 years from his life.

According to the MSSM study, *this is not an isolated case.*

Each day, precious years of life and moments of health are robbed from the painters and allied tradesmen by trade "companions" who cannot be stopped or controlled because of a lack of evidence. These killer companions are the chemicals of the painting trades.

No doubt, many of the painters have long suspected some of their chemical companions of detrimental activities: the sore throat and burn-

ing nose after a day of spraying or mixing paints and solvents; dizziness and exhilaration followed by nausea, a loss of appetite, headaches and sleeplessness; a cough that won't quit, shortness of breath, stomach problems and skin irritation, not to mention broken bones and maiming so prevalent in a "scaffold trade."

But as the MSSM study is quick to point out, "few if any studies had

'The highest rate for serious accidents was among painters'

been undertaken to determine what the health effects might be under conditions of use of these materials in the construction industry."

A review of the scientific literature by Dr. Kingsly Kay of MSSM revealed only fragmentary and speculative evidence of chemical health hazards in the paint trades.

For example, the Workmen's Compensation Board of New York discovered from statistical analysis that "the highest rate for serious accidents in the state was found among general painters."

They speculated that "exposure to solvents and other neurotoxic chemicals in a "scaffold trade" was responsible for this."

However, the speculation was not followed up with scientific investigation.

Laboratory testings proved no more helpful.

Rabbits and mice, infected, injected and dissected in numerous laboratory "toxicological evaluations," have demonstrated that harm from acute exposure to chemicals of the paint trade do exist.

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tradesmen don't shave their heads and rub solvent on them, nor inject lumps of silica or coal tars into their bellies or lungs, so the findings of laboratory studies cannot provide proof of harms under actual working conditions.

Dr. Kay also found many new epoxies, solvents and paints increasingly utilized in the paint trades since World War II—including monomers, polymers and a variety of chromates—which have never been tested.

Many painters and allied tradesmen are exposed daily to high concentrations of these chemicals, though their toxicological harms are incompletely known even among the mice and rabbits of laboratories.

Thus the study began like a "whodunit" thriller, in a dark room filled with "boogies" and "suspects" and nary a clue in sight. But IBPAT helped open the doors on the mystery.

IBPAT's Executive Council provided MSSM with detailed descriptions of trade conditions. President S. Frank Raftery helped organize IBPAT, industry, government and health-science personnel into the National Joint Safety and Health Committee, which provided the MSSM a forum for discussion.

Surveys and statistics compiled by IBPAT's Research Department were made available to MSSM by Research director Frank Burkhardt. Leadership from the international level to the local level worked to arrange clinics. And, most important, IBPAT Brothers cooperated 100 percent, submitting to lengthy examinations.

Other organizations also helped MSSM shed light on the mystery.

The National Association of Paint and Coating Manufacturers invited

the study's director, Dr. Selikoff, to meet with them. At the meeting the materials manufacturers expressed their support to help uncover the potential health hazards so that "appropriate corrective measures could be considered."

The United States Government provided consultation and information as well as money to fund the projects. Dr. Marcus Key, NIOSH director, was especially helpful and sympathetic.

By late 1973 enough information had been gathered by the MSSM detectives to devise a plan to expose the chemical culprits and their "modus operandi."

They divided the culprits into five broad categories:

- organic solvents (thinners, cleaners, etc.)
- pigments (mainly lead, but also cadmium and titanium compounds)
- silica dust (sandblasters and metal painters)
- asbestos dust (tapers, etc.)
- resins and plastics (epoxy, resins, PVD)

The painters and allied tradesmen were grouped into six broad categories, based on their predominant type of work:

- painters and paint manufacturers
- tapers
- floor tile workers
- sandblasters and metal painters
- titanium dioxide manufacturers
- other (glaziers, carpet layers, etc.)

They devised a worker examination form, listing the many adverse health symptoms they expected to find among workers exposed to the chemicals in the five main areas of the study.

The form included occupational histories of the workers, so that

'IBPAT helped open the doors on the mystery'

those exposed to similar chemicals could be grouped.

To complete the examination, a battery of skin, lung, nervous system, pulmonary, cardiac, gastrointestinal and locomotor tests were selected.

Administering the examinations was a lengthy process. At one test location, St. Louis, a team of 27 doctors and technicians spent six days working from 9:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. examining 600 participating Brothers (see *Painters Journal*, June 1975).

Before the study was completed, the MSSM team would face many obstacles. A lack of previous scientific information would hamper their efforts to organize study guidelines; the overwhelming confusion caused by multiple exposures to chemicals among the tradesmen would frustrate them; and the accurate determination of past and present exposure levels among tradesmen would be elusive.

Over the next months, more than 1000 painters, iron painters, sandblasters, paper hangers, dry wall construction workers and tapers, paint factory workers, wood finishers and floor tile sanders from Los Angeles, New York, Toledo, St. Louis and Patterson, N.J., would be examined.

The net was closing on the culprits responsible for death and suffering among the painters and allied tradesmen.