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CITY ACTS TO CURB ASBESTOS SPRAY

Begins Hearings on Cancer
Peril in Industrial Use

By DAVID BIRD

The city opened hearings yesterday on proposed regulations that would control the spraying of asbestos to insulate and fireproof buildings.

The regulations concerning asbestos, which has been strongly implicated as a cancer-causing agent, would be the first of their kind in the country.

But because expert testimony yesterday indicated that substitutes might be just as harmful, officials said the regulations would be extended to the spraying of all such material.

One of the witnesses was Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, director of the Environmental Sciences Laboratory at Mount Sinai Medical Center and a leading specialist on the dangers of asbestos.

He said that it had taken long years of study to prove that asbestos caused cancer and that he was not willing to "play Russian roulette with the people of New York" to wait and find out if the new substitute materials would cause cancer.

Dr. Selikoff said that such substitutes as rock wool and fiberglass had long-lasting qualities similar to asbestos and could therefore remain in the lungs for long periods and damage the tissue as asbestos did.

A Long-Time Suspect

Asbestos has long been considered a danger to those who work with it, but the relatively new spraying technique has increased the danger to the general public. Most of the spraying is done to make buildings fireproof with the dry asbestos mixed with water and shot through a nozzle onto beams, floors and ceilings.

Spraying has grown rapidly because it replaces the much costlier method of enclosing supporting members in concrete.

In the spraying process, however, as much as 50 per cent of the asbestos escapes into the air.

To control this, the regulations proposed by the city would require the enclosing of spray areas and cleanup and disposal procedures.

Dr. Selikoff said that as long ago as 1924 it was discovered that people who worked with asbestos developed scarred lungs. It took almost 30 more years of study to link the asbestos with cancer.

A study of 632 members of the asbestos workers' union here was begun in 1943 by Dr. Selikoff. By last April 4, he said, 403 of the 632 had died, 72 of lung cancer. He termed that number of lung cancer deaths a "disaster" because in a normal group of that size only about 10 such deaths would be expected.

The physician said the contamination had spread to the point where "every person in New York City has some asbestos in his lungs."

The proposals to enclose asbestos-spraying areas to protect the public drew concern from the State Labor Department that concentrations of the dust might then be even greater for those doing the spraying.

Jack Baliff, chief engineer of the state agency's industrial hygiene division, said the higher concentrations of asbestos dust would require breathing apparatus with an independent air supply instead of the present filter masks. Dr. Robert N. Rickles, who heads the city's Department of Air Resources, said the new regulations include that protection.

The hearings resume today at 10 A.M. at The Cooper Union, 51 Astor Place, which is also the headquarters of the Department of Air Resources.

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