General agreement existed as to the size of asbestos fiber that caused the problem; no agreement existed on was the number of fibers per cubic centimeter that should be the limit in factory air in order to prevent disease. Some said 12; some said 5; some said 2. It was this argument that roared through the late 1960s and early 1970s — and which to some extent persists to this day — but I am getting ahead of my story.

While awareness was growing in American government and industry in the early 1960s that something needed to be done about the asbestos threat — and many things were being done in terms of improving factory conditions — it was not an issue known to any except a handful of scientists, government officials and enlightened industry leaders. Those in industry who were either unaware of the hazard or who chose to discount it, could ignore it with impunity because of the weaknesses of the Walsh-Healey Act. Something or someone needed to come along to stir up the country. It was a someone. His name was Irving Selikoff.

The First Large-Scale Study

Dr. Irving Selikoff was a chest physician who throughout the more public part of his career was head of the Division of Environmental Medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York and director of its Environmental Sciences Laboratory. In 1962 he began a decades-long study of the mortality of union workers in the asbestos insulation industry in the New York City area. These were not workers who manufactured asbestos-containing insulations; instead they were the people who installed asbestos insulation in New York area skyscrapers and schools and, when the insulation deteriorated and needed to be replaced, ripped it out.

The health experience of the asbestos insulation workers, as Dr. Selikoff discovered, was disastrous. Their rates of asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma were higher than any other asbestos researcher had found among any other asbestos-exposed population anyplace in the world. Equally as important, it was the first large-scale study of an asbestos industry group in the United States that produced results similar to studies done in Great Britain and South Africa. It was no longer possible to say, It can't happen here. Dr. Selikoff published his study of the insulation workers in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in the spring of 1964. The asbestos problem was starting to enter the limelight.

The next four years witnessed increasing efforts from Dr. Selikoff and his associates at Mount Sinai to focus American public attention on the plight of the insulation workers and by implication on workers throughout the asbestos industry, both here and abroad. While his studies produced no data that could help in the development of an appropriate numerical fiber standard — all he knew was the