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# Wider Link to Cancer Found in Asbestos Workers

By BOYCE RENSBERGER

A team of cancer researchers reported yesterday that asbestos, already implicated as a cause of lung cancer in workers repeatedly exposed to the material, might also have caused a three-fold increase in the incidence of cancer of the stomach, colon and rectum in the same workers.

The finding, which the scientists said confirmed a long-held suspicion, raises the possibility that the low levels of airborne asbestos particles known to exist in urban air may increase the risk of cancer among the public at large.

The researchers also said that their findings might lead to a better understanding of gastrointestinal cancer, the causes of which are not known.

The report was given in Lyon, France, before the International Agency for Research on Cancer, an arm of the World Health Organization, by Dr. Irving J. Selikoff of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond and Herbert Seidman of the American Cancer Society's Environmental Cancer Research Project.

The findings are based on a study of 632 members of the New York and New Jersey branches of the insulation workers' union who worked with various forms of asbestos, a widely used fireproofing material.

From 1943, when the study began, until the end of 1971, the researchers monitored the health and causes of death of the workers. Several years ago Dr. Selikoff and Dr. Hammond calculated that insulation workers were dying of lung cancer about eight times as frequently as men of similar background not exposed to airborne asbestos fibers.

At that time there was a suggestion that other types of cancer might also be more common, but not until now, the scientists said, was there sufficient statistical evidence to confirm the suspicion.

However, now that more time has elapsed since the initial exposure to asbestos, the researchers found that 41 workers had died of cancer of the stomach, colon or rectum—about three times the number that would have been expected under normal circumstances.

Among the same number of men in a similar age group not unusually exposed to asbestos, only 12.5 should have died of the same cuases.

Earlier studies have shown that in the process of applying asbestos insulation during the construction of buildings and ships, countless tiny particles of the material become dislodged and float into the air.

In urban areas it has been skown that another significant source of airborne asbestos is the wearing away of asbestos brake linings in automobiles and trucks. The act of applying the brakes in such vehicles rubs off a fine asbestos dust that is then kicked into the air by the drafts of moving traffic.

Examination of the lungs of persons and animals exposed to such air has shown that the particles often lodge in the tissue and, apparently, remain embedded for long periods of time.

Last week Dr. Selikoff reported on a study of asbestos exposure among World War II shipbuilders. He warned that such persons should be aware of their increased risk of cancer and should get more frequent check-ups so that the disease can be diagnosed when it is more treatable.

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