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Asbestos Cancer Risk Linked to Low Level Of Contact With Fiber

Asbestos-linked cancer is back in the headlines with new findings by Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York suggesting that lower exposures than previously believed may lead to the asbestos cancer mesothelioma. The new study also raises doubts about Federal asbestos standards in the workplace and fears about general public exposure to asbestos fibers.

It shows that of 210 family relatives of workers employed between 1941 and 1954 at the Union Carbide in Watertown, N.Y., about 10 percent had developed ailments associated with mesothelioma - a disease linked to asbestos fibers and which has no known cause other than asbestos fiber exposure.

In some of these cases, the abnormalities showed up in families of workers who had only spent a few days at the plant, and within the past three months, three chil-

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dren of the 933 workers employed there were discovered to be mesothelioma cases.

The fathers of two of these three worked in the plant for a year, about thirty years ago. Another victim received indirect exposure to asbestos for only six months when she was a child of four.

In other recent developments, British researchers have reported that exposure at levels specified in Federal workplace regulations may lead to mesothelioma, asbestos and other cancers.

A second UK study, of rats, shows mesothelioma developing after one day of exposure. A preliminary study made in Canada indicates that ingestion of small quantities of the fibers can cause cancerous tumors.

As a result of these and other new developments, Dr. Irving J. Schkoff, head of the Mount Sinai Laboratory of Environmental Sciences, says there could be an epidemic of mesothelioma. The disease takes two to four decades to develop, and asbestos production today is ten times 1940's levels.

Later last week, union officials reacted bitterly to the published reports. Anthony Mazzocchi, legislative director of the Oil Chemical & Atomic Workers Union said:

"We will be fighting from a different dimension. We'll be looking at a whole generation of our children. It's one thing to destroy a worker. It's another to destroy his family."

Mr. Mazzocchi told the *New York Times* his union would challenge new Federal asbestos regulations on the ground that they fail to protect the health of workers and their families.

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