

Fly-Ash, Cinders

The term *fly-ash* is usually applied to the extremely small particles of ash, and the term *cinder* to the larger particles of coke and ash which are discharged with the gases of combustion from burning coal.

EFFECTS OF AIR POLLUTION ON HEALTH

Many kinds of dusts and gases are capable of producing pathological changes which may cause ill health. The harmful effects depend largely upon the chemical and physical nature of the impurities, and the concentration, length of time, and conditions under which they are breathed. Dust particles must be minute in size to be inhaled at all, although fairly large particles may gain access to the upper air passages.

The human body possesses remarkable filtering media for protecting the lungs. Small hairs which line the nasal passages, and a multitude of microscopic hairs, called *cilia*, in the epithelium lining in the bronchial tubes intercept many of the dust particles before they reach the lungs.

PULMONARY EFFECTS

The constant inhalation of dusts in city air irritates the mucous membranes of the nose, throat, and lungs, and eventually may produce discomfort and a series of minor respiratory disorders. The pigmented lung of the city dweller is an example of the pathological change produced over a period of years. This condition may be of no clinical importance, but an exaggeration of it in the coal miner results in anthracosis or dark spots on the lung due to the presence of phagocytized pigment in the lymph channels which impairs the functioning of the lung cells under stress.

Effects of Solids

Bronchitis is the chief condition associated with exposure to thick dust, and follows upon inhalation of practically any kind of insoluble and non-colloidal dust. Atmospheric dust in itself cannot be blamed for causing tuberculosis, but it appears to have a marked influence in aggravating the disease once it has started. There is, however, quite reliable evidence that carbon pigment, one of the atmospheric dusts, tends to wall off local tuberculosis rather than to further its spread.

The sulphurous fumes and tarry matter in smoke are probably more dangerous than the carbon. In foggy weather the accumulation of these substances in the lower strata may be such as to cause irritation of the eyes, nose, and respiratory passages, leading to asthmatic breathing and bronchitis and, in extreme cases, to death. The Meuse Valley fog disaster will probably become a classic example in the history of gaseous air pollution. Released in a rare combination of atmospheric calm and dense fog, it is believed that sulphur dioxide and other toxic gases from the industrial region of the valley caused 63 sudden deaths, and injuries to several hundred persons. Physical examination showed difficult breathing, rapid pulse, cyanosis, cardiac dilation, and a redness and inflammation of the mucosa of the nose, mouth, throat, trachea, and bronchi.

Carbon monoxide from automobiles and from chimney gases con-

stitutes another important source of aerial pollution in busy cities. During heavy traffic hours and under atmospheric conditions favorable to concentration, the air of congested streets is found to contain enough *CO* to menace the health of those exposed over a period of several hours, particularly if their activities call for deep and rapid breathing. In open air under ordinary conditions the concentration of *CO* in city air is believed to be insufficient to affect the average city dweller or pedestrian.

Occlusion of Solar Radiation

The loss of light, particularly the occlusion of solar ultra-violet light due to smoke and soot, is beginning to be recognized as a health problem in many industrial cities. Measurements of solar radiation in Baltimore¹ by actinic methods show that the ultra-violet light in the country was 50 per cent greater than in the city. In New York City² a loss as great as 50 per cent in visible light was found by the photo-electric cell method.

The effect of air pollution on the health of city dwellers is difficult to determine, owing to the slowness of its manifestations. The aesthetic and economic objections to air pollution are so definite, and the effect of airborne pollen can be shown so readily as the cause of hay fever and other allergic diseases, that means and expenses of prevention or elimination of this pollution have seemed justifiable to the public.

INDUSTRIAL AIR POLLUTION

In many industrial processes, sufficient amounts of dusts, fumes, and vapors are liberated to be injurious to the health of workers. Some dusts are poisonous (lead, mercury, arsenic, manganese, and cadmium) and some act as irritants (silica, steel, iron, and granite). Certain dusts may produce catarrhal conditions and increase susceptibility to such diseases as bronchitis, pneumonia, and tuberculosis. Silicious dust is especially harmful because it has a direct damaging action upon the tissue of the lungs, but organic dusts, both animal and vegetable (hair, pollen, textile, and fiber), do not seem to affect the lungs at all, although they may cause considerable discomfort in the upper respiratory passages to persons sensitive to them.

Industrial gases and fumes act specifically upon the mucous membranes, the lungs, blood, skin, and eyes. Some extremely poisonous gases act after very short exposures. Among these are carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulphide, ammonia, chlorine, bromine, arsine, and cyanogen.

The industrial processes which liberate harmful substances are too manifold and the effects too diverse to be considered here, where discussion is limited to the commonest and most serious with which the ventilating engineer may be confronted: namely, carbon monoxide, lead, and silica. For a more thorough treatise on the subject reference should be made to books by Hamilton³, Rosenau⁴, and Henderson and Haggard⁵.

¹Effects of Atmospheric Pollution upon Incidence of Solar Ultra-Violet Light, by J. H. Shrader, M. H. Coblenz and F. A. Korff (*American Journal of Public Health*, p. 7, Vol. 19, 1929).

²Studies in Illumination, by J. E. Ives (*U. S. Public Health Service Bulletin No. 197*, 1930).

³Industrial Poisons in the United States, by Alice Hamilton.

⁴Preventive Medicine and Hygiene, by Milton J. Rosenau.

⁵Noxious Gases, by Y. Henderson and H. Haggard.