

Job-related disease research blocked, M.D. says

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PHILADELPHIA — Industrial leaders have long blocked scientific probes of occupational health hazards, including the high risk of cancer in some jobs, the president of the American Public Health Association charged yesterday.

"For too many decades," said Dr. Lester Breslow, "we have swept the problems of occupation health under the rug. There has been a very subtle and powerful prohibition against even looking at these things."

The coal miners' disease, "black lung," caused by coal dust, is an example, Breslow said as he awarded the APHA's Presidential Citation to four physicians who fought for measures to control black lung disease and

provide compensation for workers.

Breslow, of the University of California School of Public Health at Berkeley, and Dr. Lorin Kerr of the United Mine Workers of America, said that public health workers should follow this example and fight other occupational health diseases.

One is "white lung" a disease caused by cotton dust and marked by shortness of breath and coughing, according to Dr. Isadore Buff of Charleston, W. Va., one of the physicians who fought black lung. He said white lung affects 125,000 women who work on cotton looms in North and South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia.

In the rubber and dye industries, Breslow and Kerr said, there is an ammonia derivative in use that is believed to cause bladder cancer and has been outlawed in Great Britain since 1951. In the United States, they

said, only Pennsylvania has outlawed its use and that was three years ago.

There is a high frequency of lung cancer among lead, zinc, and copper workers in the Colorado plateau, they said, and unexplained incidents of brain tumor among rubber workers. Two kinds of lung cancer affect asbestos workers, they said.

Asked who he felt was responsible for sweeping these problems under the rug, Breslow said, "I think the managers of industry and those subject to their influence. In many instances, there is an assumption that conditions are not adverse to

health and this somehow prevails for decades."

Now, he said, there is "a mounting public outcry for social action and we in public health would do well to heed this crescendo."

The APHA, Breslow said, should join forces with such groups as the physicians who fought black lung and attack these other occupational hazards.

"This award," Kerr said, "focuses national attention upon the almost extinct subject of the health of all workers on the job."

"Over the years," he added, "I have encountered a disturbing lack of concern

among many physicians about this subject and a frighteningly cavalier attitude about the prevention of these illnesses and injuries

"For example," he continued, "we are ignorant about the number of workers disabled or killed by exposure

to carbon monoxide, lead and dynamite."

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