FILE NAME: Talc (TALC)

DATE: 1972 Mar 22

DOC#: TALC060

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter to FDA from Barry Castleman Questioning What the FDA is Doing to Research the Carcinogenicity of Talcs

March 22, 1972

Food and Drug Administration
Department of Health, Education and Welfare
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Attention: Dr. John F. Palmer, M.D., Deputy Director
Bureau of Drugs

Dear Dr. Palmer:

I am writing to find out what the FDA is doing to research the suspected carcinogenicity of talcs (with and without tremolite asbestos); and what measures are being taken to safeguard the public against exposure to asbestos-containing consumer products (building materials, fabrics, etc.).

As you probably know, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has just published the document, "Criteria for a Recommended Standard ..... Occupational Exposure to Asbestos." The closing remark in section V, Development of Standard, reads, "Thus, the effect after several decades of a one-time acute dose of limited duration which overwhelms the clearing mechanism, and is retained in the lungs, may be as harmful [carcinogenic] as the cumulative effect of lower daily doses of exposure over many years of work." Asbestos is known to have been used in over 3000 applications including filter media for production of drugs, cheap cigars, home boiler insulation, heat-resistant clothing, paper products, sprayed fireproofing insulation, and numerous building products.

Talc is mineralogically similar to asbestos, and in a survey of 51 commercial talcs in 1942, 17 were found to have greater than trace amounts of tremolite asbestos, which frequently occurs combined with talc deposits. Recent publications have pointed out the possibility of talc causing ovarian cancer and stomach cancer (in Japan). However, as far as I know, no one has been able to firmly establish talc as being either carcinogenic or harmless. The most disturbing use of talc I know of is in recently-marketed feminine hygiene sprays. Also, some cosmetic powders have strikingly high fibrous content.

Any information you can send about the FDA's activities on asbestos and talc will be deeply appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Barry L. Castleman
Division of Air Pollution and
Industrial Hygiene
Bureau of Environmental Services

BLC/cms
cc: Dr. Earl Meyers
Dr. Jerome Goldstein