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Report Brands It As Killing Pollutant

Feared Source Of 'Epidemic' Cancer

"In what is worrying all of Irving J. Schickel, a leading asbestos hazard. Schickel, based on results of his latest studies at Hospital in New York City, says that asbestos may be even deadlier than the Linton report

City Dwellers

as latest techniques of electron probe characteristic asbestos people who now come to New York," Schickel says. "I can people who live in cities have in lungs."

used in some 2,000 products physical properties. The only can be worn into cloth, drop as wire, heat and fire radically immune to decay. qualities make asbestos poisonous to the lungs. Asbestos inhaled, remain in the lungs

long been known to be workers with high levels of fiber — one out of five dies of lung cancer and mesothelioma. Mes-

othelioma affects only one in 10,000 in the general population.

In the last few years an increasing number of cases of mesothelioma associated with asbestos have been reported in people with apparently only short term exposure. The first group of mesothelioma cases reaching epidemic proportions was reported in South Africa in 1964. Of 33 patients who developed the fatal disease, states the Linton report, "the majority had not actually worked with asbestos but had lived in the vicinity of the (Cape of Good Hope asbestos) mine and mills, and some had left these areas of exposure as young children." The cancer generally develops 10 to 20 years after initial exposure.

Sawed Plasterboard

Even more alarming are the results of a study of 42 people who died of mesothelioma in southeastern Pennsylvania between 1956 and 1962. Only 16 of the 42 were occupationally exposed. Three others were relatives of asbestos workers, eight either lived or worked near an asbestos factory and 16 had at least some minor exposure to asbestos.

Of the 16 with minor exposure, one was a 14-year-old boy who at one time had helped his father saw up and install plasterboard

during an extensive remodeling of their house. Another was a salesman who had mined and applied asbestos-cement insulation to boilers in his house.

Ralph J. Sullivan, author of the Linton report on asbestos, says construction and demolition sites are the most dangerous sources of pollution. "On most construction sites asbestos dust is not controlled," Sullivan says. "There are sites where they actually spray asbestos on steel girders." If the dust is not controlled by tarp enclosures or wetting, it can contaminate city air.

Three-fourths of all asbestos consumed in the United States is used in construction as asbestos-cement, floor tile, roofing felts and insulation. Non-construction uses include friction products such as brake, clutch and transmission lining of automobiles and asbestos textiles.

Other exposures from asbestos may come from contaminated clothing worn home by asbestos workers, "do-it-yourself" installation projects, insecticides, fertilizers, soil conditioners and talcum cosmetics.

Proper Use

Asbestos is not dangerous if used properly. Most asbestos products are coated. Exposure occurs when an asbestos sub-

stance is torn or broken, releasing dust into the air. Asbestos product manufacturing plants are located in more than 100 cities in 25 states. But the Linton report found that pollution from asbestos factories is "minimal" because the industry uses elaborate ventilation systems and wet processes to control the dust.

Asbestos fibers have, however, been detected in the air near asbestos factories in the United States, the report adds, but how much no one knows, since satisfactory monitoring methods have not yet been designed.

The Linton report has been received with skepticism by some occupational health scientists. Dr. Lewis J. Cradley, director of the division of epidemiology at NIOSH's Bureau of Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, says he has read the report.

"I can't vouch for (the Linton conclusions)," he says. "There are no studies which would support that. I understand that certain parts of that were withdrawn."

John Lumsden, chief of occupational health in North Carolina, says he has not read the Linton report and "probably won't read it." "I'm not responding to the hysteria if there is any."

Lumsden said — somewhat cryptically — that "most" of the state's four asbestos-textile plants are "satisfactorily controlling asbestos dust."

Not Scientists

Some critics of the Linton report point out that it is simply a review of the literature done by laymen, not scientists. That is, the rationale for another government-sponsored study, this time to be conducted by an yet unannounced panel of scientists, under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences.

One member of the panel, who asked not to be named, said the new study is "the result of a great deal of pressure on NIOSH."

But the data on asbestos is already massive and, even without the Linton conclusions, disturbing. "The problem is an urgent one," says Schickel. "And we cannot wait 20 to 30 years to determine what the long-term results of exposure to the public will be."

(Editor's Note: Rachel Scott is an investigative reporter for Dispatch News Service. A former reporter for the Washington Post-Journal, her stories have also appeared in The New Republic, The Washington Post and Knight Newspapers.)