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Nader Asks EPA to Monitor Use Of Asbestos in New Structures

By Elsie Carper
Washington Post Staff Writer

Ralph Nader's Center for Responsive Law warned yesterday of asbestos pollution inside new buildings and called on the Environmental Protection Agency to start a monitoring program.

Prolonged inhalation of asbestos has been linked to chest and abdominal cancer. A New York study showed that one out of five asbestos workers dies of the lung disease.

In a letter to EPA Adminis-

trator William D. Ruckelshaus, Nader pointed out that in new buildings, especially large public buildings, the enclosed spaces above ceilings are being used for return ducts to save the cost of sheet metal duct work.

Many of these areas have been sprayed with asbestos fiber for fire protection and thermal control.

"The connection of these closed ceilings with the duct system must result in some erosion of the asbestos coating and varying amounts of asbes-

tos contamination of the air must surely occur," the letter said.

Asbestos was one of three air pollutants that the EPA identified earlier this week as so hazardous to health that even slight exposure may contribute to death or serious illness. The agency said that it will set limits on the amount that reaches the air. The other hazardous substances named by the EPA were beryllium, a toxic metal that also produces lung diseases, and mercury, already identified as a water contaminant that concentrates in fish and builds up in the human body. It can cause irreversible brain damage.

In the letter to the EPA, Nader said that the agency may not be able to require modification in building design, but it has the authority to take air samples, analyze them and fine polluters.

"Generally several decades elapse between initial asbestos exposure and noticeable detrimental health effects," the letters aid. "Americans can ill afford to wait until these effects are observed."

New York and Philadelphia have prohibited asbestos sprays on construction sites. The product had been widely used to insulate steel girders. Washington has no such regulation against use and is waiting for the EPA directive.

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April 15, 1971

Miss Elsie Carper
THE WASHINGTON POST
1515 L Street, N.W.
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Dear Miss Carper:

Your April 2 story about Nader's group asking monitoring of asbestos contains a number of errors of fact which we would like to point out to you in hope that they can be avoided in future articles on asbestos.

The story states that a New York study showed that one out of five "asbestos workers" dies of lung disease. This is not correct. The study referred to a small group of insulation workers in the construction industry who are exposed to a number of substances in the course of their work. The classification of insulation workers as "asbestos workers" implies incorrectly that they work directly in asbestos mines or factories.

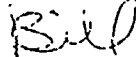
The story also notes an EPA statement that even slight exposure (to asbestos) may contribute to death or serious illness. Scientific studies of asbestos-related diseases indicate that they occur after heavy exposure over a long period of time and thus are confined to occupational settings where they can be controlled. There has been no demonstrated hazard to the general public.

The story also states that New York and Philadelphia have prohibited asbestos spray on construction sites. This is also incorrect, although both cities are considering such a ban.

Both the spray insulation industry and the asbestos industry support strict controls over the application of spray asbestos insulation. Proper controls can both protect the workers applying the material and prevent public exposure.

I am enclosing a file of factual background information which I hope will be of value to you when writing on the subject in the future. If you need additional information at any time, don't hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,



William P. Raines
Secretary

WPR:nml
Enclosure
cc: Eugene Patterson, Managing Editor

Sponsored by Certain-teed Products Corp., Flintkote Co., GAF Corp., Johns-Manville Corp.,
National Gypsum Co., Panaco Corp., Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc. and Woodward Corp.,
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