

Asbestos**SELIKOFF CALLS FOR WIDER SAFEGUARDS;
CONTROL ADEQUACY, DATA MEANING DEBATED**

MONTREAL — (By a BNA Staff Correspondent) — A ban on the use of asbestos will not be requested if "proper control" of exposure is achieved in the wide spectrum of workplaces where fibers are found, according to Irving J. Selikoff, director of the Environmental Sciences Laboratory of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Selikoff made his remarks May 25 during the opening session of the World Symposium on Asbestos, sponsored by the governments of Canada and Quebec and the Commission of the European Communities.

Industry has "done what it can" to limit exposure in asbestos mines and mills but now must expand its efforts to control exposure in workplaces where asbestos products are used, Selikoff told the symposium. The remaining disease problems, he warned, will be found among construction workers and others who work where there are "virtually no controls, respirators, or instruction."

Selikoff urged the asbestos industry to begin a surveillance and notification program for exposed workers. Noting that cessation of cigarette smoking has been found to contribute to a reversal of disease risk in previously exposed workers, he argued that companies have the responsibility to inform workers of past exposure and warn them of the effects of smoking. In addition, he said, "virtually no exposed workers are under surveillance," asserting that periodic medical examinations could make early cures possible.

Fiber Types, Uncertainties

Epidemiologists have not made progress in helping society control the risks of asbestos exposure since the basic data were reported 20 years ago, according to John Corbett McDonald, head of the McGill University Institute of Occupational Health and Safety. Conclusions still must be reached concerning a dose-response relationship and variations between the effects of different asbestos fiber types, he told the session.

Substantial differences have been found, he said, between the effects of amosite and crocidolite asbestos and the more widely used chrysotile type. While he has seen no evidence of crocidolite use without a hazard, "it is probably possible" to use chrysotile safely in such products as brake linings, McDonald maintained. He speculated that health effects "depend perhaps on the size and type of fiber."

Remaining uncertainties also were stressed by John Higginson, until recently director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, and Hans Weill, professor of medicine at Tulane University.

Weill maintained that diagnosis of asbestos-related disease "continues to be a problem after nearly a century." He argued that four of the six indicators used to detect asbestos-related disease are "non-specific" and commonly found in both patients with the disease and those without it.

The medical researcher characterized diagnosis as a question of "weighing the probabilities based on the total picture, including exposure." He reported that a forthcoming document prepared by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the College of American Pathologists will recommend that, when available, both lung fibrosis and a demonstrated finding of fibers in the lung are needed for adequate diagnosis from tissue samples.

Higginson, discussing science's limited understanding of the variables of cancer causation in general, predicted that research in the next decade into the mechanisms of carcinogenic action will aid regulators in determining what alternative preventive measures should be taken. Better comprehension of which factors initiate the formation of tumors and which promote or deter their growth may help scientists determine an "operational threshold," the conditions under which no effect can be found, he urged.