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Indian Lung Disease Linked to Asbestos Used to Make Jewelry

BOSTON (AP)—The use of asbestos to make silver jewelry and to whiten moccasins for ceremonial dances is responsible for an outbreak of a rare form of lung cancer among New Mexican Indians, doctors reported.

The U.S. Public Health Service doctors began an investigation after finding that the incidence of malignant mesothelioma, a form of lung cancer associated with asbestos, was 1,000 times higher than expected at one Indian pueblo.

Five people, all from the same village, had the disease between 1970 and 1985.

Dr. Richard J. Driscoll and other researchers reported their findings in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Four of the victims were silversmiths.

The researchers found that they typically used asbestos mats, which they called pounding boards, to insulate their work tables against the heat of torches and molten metal.

All five also participated in ceremonial dances. Before the dances, the Indians used asbestos to whiten their buckskin leggings and moccasins.

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