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Cancer Kills 1 in 5 Asbestos Workers, Says Doc

Washington, Feb. 25 (News Bureau)—New York and New Jersey insulation workers exposed by their jobs to asbestos have been dying of cancer four times as often as the population at large, a Mount Sinai School of Medicine professor reported today.

At a meeting here of the government's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Dr. Irving J. Selikoff said 52 cancer deaths would have been expected among 632 men in the metropolitan New York area whose health records have been followed since 1943, but 200 actually have occurred to date.

'It's Simply a Disaster'

Selikoff, considered to be one of the world's leading experts on cancer-causing chemicals, said, "It now seems clear that one out of every five workers exposed to asbestos will die of cancer and probably cancer of the lung. It's simply a disaster."

Selikoff—who obtained the data for the analysis from the International Association of Heat, Frost and Insulation Workers, an AFL-CIO union—said 89 of the men died of the most common

form of lung cancer and that many of these had been cigarette smokers, which had undoubtedly increased their risk.

However, he said, an additional 35 of the cancer deaths were from mesothelioma, a type of tumor that is almost unheard of in the absence of exposure to asbestos. There was no link to cigarettes in these. Nor, he said, did smoking seem to account for the excess of deaths from other types of cancer the new study has turned up.

Risk Cited for Others

Selikoff told the meeting that insulation workers are not the only people at risk. It is apparent, he said, that people living near an asbestos plant or with an asbestos worker in the household have greater chances of getting cancer.

Selikoff also expressed concern for the 100,000 men in this country who work in garages repairing or lining brakes. While it was once thought that the heat used in the process eliminated the risk from asbestos dust, it is now clear that this is untrue, he said. The use of vacuum equipment instead of blowers helps to solve the problem, he said, but this is not generally known.