

Meeting on Asbestos at Dr. Irving J. Selikoff's office, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, N.Y. on September 16, 1974.

Present were Dr. Selikoff, his staff, Mr. Sheldon Samuel, Representatives of twelve National or International Unions.

Mr. Samuel opened the meeting with a discussion of the standards on Asbestos fibers in the air. The industry wants the test period changed from fifteen minutes to ten minutes; there would then be less chance of finding the number of fibers specified in the standard.

Dr. Selikoff explained why the standard is meaningless and should be reduced. It is a fact that some studies show that among people with any exposure to asbestos 40% contract some kind of cancer and 5-7% contract asbestosis. The standard is now 5 fibers per cubic centimeter of air, or 5,000,000 fibers per cubic meter of air. The standard in 1976 will be 2.5 fibers per cubic centimeter or 2,500,000 fibers per cubic meter. The only fibers counted are the long ones, there are many more short fibers where there are long ones. A person breathes about one cubic meter of air per hour. This adds up to a lot of asbestos fibers under the present and the future standard.

In 1966 the British Occupational Health Society came out with the fact that 2,000,000 fibers per hour would not cause asbestosis. They came to this conclusion because a Dr. Knox, Medical Director for Turner Brothers, a textile plant, said that their workers were subjected to 4,000,000 fibers per hour and according to his X-rays only 1-2% of the workers even had signs of asbestosis; so if the fibers in the air was cut to 2,000,000 per hour there would be no cases of asbestosis.

The B.O.H.S., the British Government, our Government Agencies never saw the X-rays. One Doctor in one factory made some statements and everyone including our Department of Labor believed him and said that 2,000,000 fibers per meter was safe and based our standard on it.

In 1970 a new medical director, Dr. Lewisohn took new X-rays and said that 70% of the workers had signs of asbestosis.

In 1974 a survey of the 290 workers who had ten or more years exposure since 1933, when new controls were instituted, and were healthy in 1966 showed that 29 have died; 7 of lung cancer (25%), 3 of Mesothelioma (10%). The highest death rate in this country was 20% for lung cancer, 5-6% for Mesothelioma. So N.I.O.S.H. took their standard from a British plant that really had a worse death rate than any plant in this country.

Besides the standard being false, only 1-3% of the plants take dust counts so the standard is meaningless anyway.

Because of so many people in high places being embarrassed the above is not common knowledge. Dr. Selikoff said he would vouch for it being accurate, but he would not reveal his source and it would be off the record.

Dr. Selikoff told of mesothelioma in children of asbestos workers. The parent would bring the dust home on his clothes. It would spread throughout the house and the whole family would be exposed to it. The doctor had five confirmed cases from Union Asbestos in Patterson, N.J..

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We had two cases in two days. One was a forty two year old man whose father worked in asbestos for one year. He died in six months of the disease. Another was a forty four year old woman whose father only worked six months in asbestos, she died in four months of the disease. The other cases were similar. We saw the X-rays of three of these people. They were very bad. These people must have been in a bad way for a long time. There is no cure for mesothelioma.

The union people have tested the dust in the attics of homes of asbestos workers. Some of these houses haven't had an asbestos worker living there for years. They found asbestos levels as high as 10% of the factory level.

There was communication from England saying that the Glasgow Pipe Coverers were having one funeral every ten to fourteen days from lung cancer or mesothelioma.

A recent court decision was discussed. The big fact that came out was that we could not close a plant that exceeded the standards. The above material was not known at the time of that decision, so the union is going to contact the Department of Labor about the decision.

A discussion of the Pittsburgh Corning, Tyler Texas plant was next. The workers there were given a Pap test. There are two confirmed cases of small lung cancers plus one case that is unconfirmed as yet. These are people whose X-rays were negative. These cancers were small and treatable. It was estimated, using the latest knowledge, that of the 900 employees there that 175 will die of lung cancer and 50 of mesothelioma.

In 1930 the world's annual production of asbestos was 500,000 tons. Now the world's annual production is 5,000,000 tons. We are now seeing the results of the low production of the thirties and forties. We can not even imagine the asbestos related deaths that will show up in the future from the increased production now.

It was agreed that this is a trade union problem. The industry is not going to do much, and the government is doing less. It's our problem and we have to solve it.

We are going to put the Department of Labor on notice that the standard is totally wrong.

We will contact the Cancer Society and try to get them to do research on mesothelioma.

We will do all that is possible to get zero exposure for workers.

We will make up a poster listing the facts, dangers, etc. of asbestos in a very graphic way. This will be put in the New York Times and the Washington Post as an ad. We expect all Labor papers to carry it and hope other papers will pick it up as a news story and publicize it.

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Jane Brodie, a newspaper woman from the New York Times, attended the meeting. She expects to have a story in that paper within a week.

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Charles L. Croop