

OCCUPATIONAL TIE TO CANCER SOUGHT

Those Exposed to Chemicals
at Work to Be Studied

By JANE E. BRODY

How many of the myriad chemicals and particles to which modern man is continually exposed may cause or enhance the growth of human cancer? To try to answer this question, the American Cancer Society, Mount Sinai Medical Center and leading trade unions are collaborating in an extensive study of workers who are occupationally exposed to suspected hazardous substances.

The study, announced yesterday at a news conference held in conjunction with the cancer society's annual meeting here, will involve a thorough analysis of the death records of hundreds of thousands of workers in various industries—including asbestos workers, typographers, printing tradesmen and chemical workers.

"We are starting with workers because they are exposed to potential chemical and physical hazards at higher concentrations, more regularly and more intimately than most people," Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, one of the study directors, told the news conference. "Ultimately," he added, "we want to apply the findings in workers to the general population, which may also be at risk."

Fiberglass Workers in Study

Dr. Selikoff, who is director of the Environmental Sciences Laboratory at Mount Sinai, gave as an example the effects of chronic exposure to fibers, which have been shown to cause cancer in some animal studies.

"If we find that fiber-glass workers have an unusually high incidence of cancer, then we would begin to worry about the general public who may be continually exposed to invisible particles in fiber-glass that get into the air from air-conditioning systems," the doctor said.

Albert E. Hutchinson, president of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers, explained that in most new high-rise buildings air-conditioning ducts are lined with fiber-glass, particles of which then get into the air inhaled by people who live in the building.

Alexander J. Rohan, president of the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants' Union of North America, told the conference that a cursory look at the death records of his union members indicated an unusually high incidence of emphysema.

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Carbon Black Inhaled

Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond, vice president for epidemiology and statistics at the cancer society and co-ordinator of the occupational study, said that pressmen inhale mists of carbon black, a close relative of lamp black, which is known to be carcinogenic (cancer-producing).

Members of New York Typographical Union No. 6, headed by Bertram A. Powers, will also be involved in the study. Men who set type are occupationally exposed to hot metal fumes and filings, which may contribute to the development of lung cancer, Dr. Hammond said.

The cooperating unions were selected, in part, for the excellent health records they have maintained on their members through the years, Dr. Selikoff said. Mr. Powers's union has death records going back to 1860, the pressmen's union has records since 1904 and the asbestos workers' union has records dating back to its inception in 1912.

Dr. Selikoff said that in many cases, employers will participate in the studies.

Dr. Hammond estimated the cancer society's contribution to the study—which has indeterminate scope and length—at about \$1-million a year.

In a speech last night at the society's annual dinner, Elliot L. Richardson, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, said that the National Cancer Institute was developing a "National Cancer Plan" under which the \$100-million in additional cancer funds approved by Congress would be allocated.