

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH REPORTER

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Asbestos**AVOIDABLE EXPOSURES NOT JUSTIFIED,
DESPITE WIDESPREAD USE, APHA TOLD**

NEW YORK, N.Y. — (By an OSHR staff correspondent) — A leading researcher on the link between asbestos exposure and lung disease told an American Public Health Association meeting that no avoidable asbestos exposure can be justified.

Irving J. Selikoff, professor of medicine at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, New York, N.Y., claimed that while some problems of asbestos exposure may be "insoluble" because of the mineral's unique industrial uses, exposures must be strictly limited to prevent the massive public health problems now arising from exposures which occurred 20 to 30 years ago.

If exposures are not controlled, Selikoff warned that society 30 years from now will be questioning why 1979 researchers "accepted a 7 percent death rate."

Selikoff's comments were made in response to questions raised at a session on the future of asbestos, held as part of APHA's annual meeting November 4 to 8.

One participant questioned the use of asbestos-concrete pipe in public water systems, to which Selikoff responded that little is known about the problems of ingesting asbestos.

David Rall, director of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, termed the asbestos concrete problem "a most troubling problem." He added that if the Government uses only epidemiological studies to regulate a substance, the long latent period of diseases will "make it impossible to study anything but 20-year-old exposures."

He added that while estimating "life and death" issues is hazardous, estimates are necessary to target opportunities for prevention.

One participant, quoting from the Johns-Manville Corporation 1978 annual report which showed increased overseas sales of asbestos, questioned what measures the company is taking to prevent the "exportation of health hazards" along with the substance.

Paul Kotin, Johns-Manville vice president for safety and health, replied that the company's marketing policy gives it the right to inspect customer's control of asbestos, and to make available consultation on safe use of the mineral.

Selikoff also reported the latest findings of a study he is conducting at the Key Highway Shipyard of Bethlehem Steel Company in Baltimore, Md. (Current Report, July 12, p. 123).

Eight out of nine workers at the shipyard had abnormal chest X-rays, Selikoff reported.

He noted it is particularly interesting that only repair and maintenance of older ships is done at Key Highway.

Between 1890 and 1970, more than 25 million tons of asbestos was put into the environment in a number of industrial uses, asbestos which "now has to be maintained, repaired and remodeled," Selikoff concluded.

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