

HILL AND KNOWLTON, INC.

MEMORANDUM

February 10, 1971

Subject: Presentation on Asbestos Disease by Dr. I.J. Selikoff at American Academy of Occupational Medicine, Park Sheraton Hotel, February 9, 1971.

The program had scheduled another paper on the subject by Dr. George Wright. Unfortunately, Dr. Wright was weather-bound at the Cleveland airport and was unable to make the meeting.

Dr. Selikoff expressed his regret at the circumstances, but took occasion to give generous praise to Dr. Wright and to Johns-Manville for their important contributions in helping to control asbestos-related disease. At the conclusion of his presentation, Selikoff repeated, "Again, I wish to thank George Wright for his tremendous contributions in this field."

The presentation, as usual, was done extemporaneously with slides. However, it was unusually restrained and avoided sensation. For example, one of his early references has always been to Kiviluoto's study of pleural plaques among community residents in a Finnish district near an asbestos mine. However, this time he made a point he has passed over in previous discussions: "Pleural plaques do no harm as far as we know. They are a radiological oddity. They appear in some asbestos workers with 20-30 years exposure, without impaired respiratory function."

Some other comments worth noting:

* The first reports of asbestos or ferruginous bodies in city dwellers, resulted in many similar studies in cities all over the world. This has provided an "unnecessary mass of data, because ferruginous bodies are not important."

* What is important is the presence of fibers or fibrils which can be positively identified as chrysotile. There is no doubt that in New York City, 100 percent of the population has a few chrysotile fibers in their lungs. However, this is not cause for undue alarm. It is a "far cry from the billions of long fibers in the lungs of asbestos insulation workers to the few fibrils present in persons not occupationally exposed."

The Q and A period brought out three questions. One on the cumulative effects of smoking and asbestos exposure got the standard reply. The others were more interesting.

Q. What does Selikoff regard as a safe TLV for asbestos workers?

A. Because of the 20-30 year time lag in the development of disease, there are no really reliable data on which to base a "safe" TLV.

We will not know whether present TLV's are really "safe" until 20 years from now. By the same token, nobody is certain what the dust levels were in factories 20 years ago. As for insulation workers, air sampling at construction sites has been practically unknown. Out of 1,100 insulation workers with 20 years experience or more, only seven men reported having seen an air sampling test done on the job.

Q. Have any studies been done of dust eroded from "asphalt roof shingles" and similar products containing asbestos?

A. It is almost certain that there is no danger from products of this type. The number of fibers emitted from wear, if any, would be "infinitesimal."

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