

Quotations on Silicosis

(Used in Silicosis Prevention Information Resources CD)

The evidence brought forward by medical witnesses as to the difficulty, and frequently, the impossibility of diagnosing the disease in its early stages is striking. The fact that so many sufferers only begin to notice any symptoms when the disease is quite in its late stage, and the patient almost incapacitated, prevents many of those already affected suspecting the presence of the disease during its commencement, when they might remove themselves from a dusty atmosphere and probably prolong existence considerably. Another point that should not be overlooked is that this disease, once extensively developed, gradually but surely destroys life, and no remedial measures apparently exercise any curative effect on the process.

Report of the Miners' Phthisis Commission. 1902–1903. With Minutes of Proceedings and Minutes of Evidence. Government Printer and Stationery Office, Pretoria; 1903. p. ix.

If by their suffering and death they will have made life safer in future for the men who go beneath the earth to work, if they will have been able to establish a new and greater regard for human life in industry, their suffering may not have been in vain.

House of Representatives Subcommittee Report, USA 1936 (on the conditions under which workmen were employed 1930–1931 on the Hawk's Nest Tunnel, Gauley Bridge, West Virginia)

Despite progress in the United States, a disaster of the magnitude of Gauley Bridge could clearly occur today in the Third World, where work forces are unorganized, non-union, intimidated, impoverished, and subject to the same sorts of conditions which prevailed in West Virginia fifty years ago.

Philip J. Landrigan and Anthony Robbins
Foreword, The Hawk's Nest Incident: America's Worst Industrial Disaster.
Martin Cherniack, Yale University Press; 1986.

...keep fine dust down to a minimum and keep that minimum away from the respiratory zone of the worker.

Alexander J. Orenstein
Father of Occupational Health, South Africa
The History of Pneumoconiosis: A Brief Review
Journal of the Mine Ventilation Society of South Africa (JMVSSA) 1958; 11(1): 23.

...when we have found out ways of controlling or reducing all types of dust, when we are rigidly applying all these methods in all working places, when we have the active support of all mining personnel in tackling the dust problem - then I am convinced there will be no more pneumoconiosis in our mines.

Derrick G. Beadle
International Expert on Airborne Dust, South Africa
MVS Presidential Address 1958
Some Unanswered Questions Regarding Dust and Pneumoconiosis
JMVSSA 1958; 11(10): 208.

In 75 years of work on the respirable dust problem in Witwatersrand mines rather limited information has been published on the dust exposure of mineworkers as opposed to dust levels in mines.

M.J. Martinson
MVS Presidential Address 1975
Occupational Health and Safety in Underground Mines
JMVSSA 1976; 29(1): 18.

Silicosis is a well-known fibrogenic lung disease. The occupational origin of silicosis was recognized as far back as the Hippocratic times. Despite all efforts to prevent it, this ancient disease still afflicts hundreds of thousands of miners and millions of other workers engaged in hazardous dusty occupations in many countries. With its potential to cause physical disability, silicosis continues to be one of the most important occupational health problems in the world.

Despite many obstacles, the idea of global elimination of silicosis is technically feasible. Positive experience gained by a number of countries shows that it is possible to reduce significantly the incidence rate of silicosis by using appropriate technologies and methods of dust control. The use of these technologies and methods has proved to be effective and economically affordable.

Igor A. Fedotov
Senior Specialist on Occupational Health, ILO
Global Elimination of Silicosis: The ILO/WHO International Programme
Asian-Pacific Newsletter on OHS Safety 1997; 4(2).

To all of you and to the Working Group, I want to say this is not the end but the beginning of a long road to the year 2030. So gear yourself for a long and bumpy ride and when you reach your destination you will look back and say: "How glad am I that I managed to hang in there".

Membathisi Mdladlana
Minister of Labour at the Launch of the NPES 2004.
Occupational Health Southern Africa. 2004; 10(5): 24.

While the story of how silicosis has been virtually eliminated in Sweden relates specifically to the time period and social conditions in the country, it also demonstrates that silicosis is not an inevitable consequence of working in mines or steel foundries. Elimination of silicosis requires efforts on many levels, both in society and in the individual businesses involved. In Sweden it was possible to gain wide acceptance for the required measures but it is important to recognize a very significant driving force for this acceptance was a shortage of labour - when workers have a choice, they avoid employment that is unhealthy.

Per Malmberg
National Institute for Working Life (NIWL), Sweden
Driving Forces Behind the Elimination of Silicosis in Sweden
OSH & Development. 2005; 6.