Organic and Synthetic Oil Contamination

Beginning in 1962, Harington and Roe published a series of articles purporting that naturally occurring as well as contaminating organic compounds may play a key role in the carcinogenic nature of asbestos. [redacted] From the industry's perspective, this was an ideal way to obfuscate the notion that its product, chrysotile, was deadly. If this "mystery" contaminant could be determined and the chrysotile "cleaned," the product and profits could be saved. Therefore QAMA supported further studies, both by providing funding and in helping with the collection of samples and other data.(Gibbs 1969)

Further investigating Harington and Roe's claims, Graham Gibbs and others at McGill University wrote a succession of papers examining organic contaminants of chrysotile. [redacted] Gibbs raised the question of whether the compounds may:

1. Themselves act as carcinogens;

2. Enhance the carcinogenic activity of other substances such as trace metals, asbestos itself, or associated oils;

3. Inhibit the action of carcinogens present in the fiber; or

4. Have no influence on the biological action whatsoever. (Gibbs 1969)

Through their studies, the researchers found that the organic contaminants were implicated in the "biological action" of chrysotile asbestos products, suggesting that these contaminants, and not the chrysotile itself, were the cause of cancer in workers. (Gibbs and Hui 1971)

They determined that the long chained alkanes found in asbestos products resulted from three possible sources: hydrocarbons occurring naturally in the ore body, contamination from the mining and milling process, and contamination from shipping, manufacturing, and utilization processes. (Gibbs and Hui 1971)