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SHIPBUILDERS COUNCIL OF AMERICA
600 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVE., N. W.
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ABC NEWS
1330 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10019

June 29, 1978

THE HEALTH HAZARDS OF ASBESTOS IN INDUSTRY AND TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC WILL BE EXAMINED IN "ABC NEWS CLOSEUP -- ASBESTOS: THE WAY TO DUSTY DEATH" ON JULY 14

Asbestos, as the biggest industrial killer in history which will claim hundreds of thousands of lives before the turn of the century, will be examined in the investigative, hour-long documentary special, "ABC News Closeup -- Asbestos: The Way to Dusty Death," airing **FRIDAY, JULY 14** (10:00-11:00 p.m., EDT), on the ABC Television Network.

"ABC News Closeup - Asbestos: The Way to Dusty Death" reveals original investigative material showing that the U.S. Navy and other federal agencies knew long ago about the hazards of asbestos but failed to act.

The correspondent is ABC News Science Editor Jules Bergman.

In Paterson, N.J. -- former home of the Union Asbestos and Rubber Co., which made asbestos products for American ships during World War II, and where asbestos workers have been studied more thoroughly than anywhere else in the nation -- about 22 percent of those workers have already died of cancer or other asbestos-related diseases, and 35 percent of their family members have lung abnormalities.

Barbara Gurrie, a 35-year-old mother, recently had a lung removed because of mesothelioma, the most deadly of asbestos cancers. Barbara's contact with asbestos was indirect. Her father, an insulator at a Massachusetts shipyard, brought home asbestos dust on his workclothes. Her father died of lung cancer, mesothelioma killed her mother. Asbestos disease, when originally detected, is irreversible, leaving its victims with an average of two years to live.

Franklin Brooks -- a former football player with Georgia Tech's Yellow Jackets -- contracted mesothelioma two years ago. As a teenager, he was an asbestos worker to help pay his way through college. Now, he suffers from severe pain in his lungs and shortness of breath, and soon will require oxygen; he has only a short time to live. For Franklin, 20 years passed before he saw the grim consequences of the "deadly dust."

More than 30 years ago, Frank Cullen worked with asbestos as a boilermaker in the navy during World War II. He left the navy after the war and never again worked with asbestos, but in 1977 developed an uncontrollable cough -- mesothelioma. He is rendered so weak that he "can't even take the top off a catsup bottle." Mr. Cullen undergoes chemotherapy treatments for one week every month at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, the nation's leading center for asbestos related diseases. Dr. Selikoff, Director of the Environmental Sciences Laboratory at Mount Sinai, says of mesothelioma: "So far, the only cause we've known for it is asbestos." Mesothelioma, now relatively common, once was rare. Selikoff explains, "From 1900 to 1960, we saw three cases, one every ten years."

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"Frank Cullen," Correspondent Bergman states, "is deeply in debt . . . the Veterans Administration has denied his claim for compensation, saying he can't prove that his illness came from his service during World War II. He is the victim of an indifferent navy . . ."

At the Mare Island Navy Yard north of San Francisco, the unions -- not the navy -- arranged for a study by Dr. Phillip Pohlkoff, an occupational health specialist from Berkeley, California. Dr. Pohlkoff examined 359 shipyard workers and found that 59 percent had lung abnormalities.

Asbestos may also be a problem to the general population. "ABC News Closeup - Asbestos: The Way to Dusty Death" examines the effects of asbestos in building construction, and goes to Yale University which has spent $250,000 to remove the cancer-causing mineral from its modern, recently constructed Arts and Architecture Building. The program also explores the hazards of asbestos in automobile brake linings, which leave tons of the deadly powder on the nation's roadways.

Dr. Paul Kotin, Medical Director and Senior Vice President of Johns Manville Company, whose products contain asbestos, responds to the federal government's attempts to tighten industrial standards for asbestos particles in the air: "Government experts have been wrong before, and they're wrong now." Correspondent Bergman asks Kotin, "Didn't you once say there was no such thing as a safe level of exposure for any carcinogen?" Dr. Kotin: "I sure did, and I said it as part of the Surgeon General's committee in 1970 . . . I guess I'll tell you I'm smarter now." Dr. Kotin is former head of the National Institute of Environmental Health Services (NIEHS), the government's top environmental health body.

The documentary also examines what the navy is doing to control asbestos use. Among the findings: a navy survey of 114 ships in the Atlantic fleet reveals that 85 percent cannot comply with the navy's own asbestos standards.

Phil Lewis is the producer of "ABC News Closeup - Asbestos: The Way to Dusty Death."

Pamela Hill is Executive Producer of ABC News Television Documentaries. Richard Richter is Senior Producer.

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