

Study of the Asbestos Products Manufacturing Industry in the United States

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Division of Occupational Health
Bureau of Disease Prevention and Environmental Control
Public Health Service
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

The Division of Occupational Health, Public Health Service, has underway an extensive epidemiologic study of the asbestos products manufacturing industry in the United States.

Purpose of Study

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The study is designed to (a) obtain information on the health effects of exposure to the major types of asbestos used in the United States (chrysotile, crocidolite, and amosite), (b) develop criteria for safe exposure levels, and (c) establish medical and environmental criteria for surveillance where asbestos is encountered or used.

Scope of Study

Baseline and longitudinal studies will be done on approximately 10,000 workers employed in the following asbestos products manufacturing areas: (a) asbestos textile materials, (b) asbestos insulating materials, (c) asbestos friction materials, and (d) asbestos cement building materials including asbestos cement piping.

Comparative cohorts, approximately 2,500 in each group, will be constructed from each of the four product manufacturing groups on which baseline in-plant environmental exposure data will be obtained, along with personnel data characterizing each individual in the cohorts. In addition to

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available retrospectively environmental exposure data, similar prospective

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will be added to the cohorts for the duration of the study. Pertinent medical data will be obtained through baseline and follow-up examinations on a substantial group within each cohort for clinical evaluation of the workers during the period of the study.

Individuals in the four cohort groups, including those who may have left the industry, will be followed until appreciable periods of exposure, 25 years and longer, as well as latent periods from time of first exposure have been covered.

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Through records of the Bureau of Old Age and Survivor's Insurance, death certificates will be located on those in the cohorts on whom benefit claims have been made. Copies of the death certificates will be obtained from the respective state departments of health, evidence confirming causes of death will be studied, and specific mortality rates established. These data, along with environmental exposure, clinical and other data characterizing individuals in the cohorts, will be studied to establish trends and relationships.

Baseline In-plant Data on Cohorts

The entire in-plant employment of each participating plant will be included in constructing the four cohorts of workers. The following information will be obtained on each individual: (a) identifying information, including date and place of birth, sex, places of residence, and social security number, (b) work history before and since entering the industry, (c) job classification and description, (d) smoking history, and (e) hobbies.

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Environmental data will be obtained characterizing in detail the nature and extent of in-plant exposures for each worker included in the study. Special attention will be given to assessing exposures to asbestos fibers, including different parameters of measurements such as total particulate count, fiber count, respirable mass, etc. In addition, other associated exposures such as metals, silica, specific polycyclic aromatic compounds, and radioactivity levels will be assessed.

Medical studies will be made to define the health status and trend in the cohorts throughout the study. The nature and design of these studies will evolve from the recommendations of the medical consultants to the study.

Since the entire in-plant employment of the participating plants will be included in the study, the range of exposure levels will permit those with minimal exposure to serve as an internal control group. Controls will also be drawn from other on-going studies by the Division.

Status of Study

Environmental studies were started during the early part of 1963. To date baseline environmental and personnel data have been collected on over 7,000 workers in the four groups. This phase of the study should be completed by the fall of 1967.

Medical studies on workers in the cohorts are anticipated to start during the latter part of 1967. In the meantime, a panel of roentgenologists is drawing up a scheme for reading the films of asbestos workers. A contract is also underway to design the pulmonary function tests to be used.

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