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DATE: 1976 Mar 26

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter to The Washington Post from Dr. Irving Selikoff Contradicting How His Views Were Portrayed in Attached Articles

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MOUNT SINAI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
of The City University of New York
FIFTH AVENUE AND 100TH STREET • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10029

Department of Community Medicine

March 26, 1976

Miss Marian Burros
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Miss Burros:

I was astonished by your article in The Washington Post on March 26, 1976, astonished because of the inaccurate stance of the story, and the sly selections used in its preparation. These gave the impression that there was disagreement on my part and on the part of our Laboratory with the position of Dr. Thomas C. Chalmers.

This can only be characterized as a deliberate distortion, not a very difficult task, I presume, on the part of a skilled writer able to make use of omissions. Thus, I specifically stated that I was in agreement with Dr. Chalmers, that I thought his statement was carefully and accurately written. I repeated this to you, so that there be no misunderstanding. Nowhere in your story is this mentioned. And one would be hard put to believe that this is an inadvertent omission. Certainly, the omission serves to provide a "newsworthy" picture of a conflict among scientists, when there is no such disagreement.

A further example of skilled slanting is the use of the phrase "Selikoff acknowledged that the cosmetic industry has "gone ahead quietly and improved the talc..." I didn't "acknowledge," with its connotation of reluctance. Rather, I stated that the cosmetic industry was to be "congratulated" on having improved its product and that credit should be given where due. But this, too, didn't fit your perspective.

We could go on; for example, you questioned me on scientific problems such as differences in Mount Sinai versus FDA techniques, safe levels for asbestos, etc. In the story you place my remarks after your misstatement about my disagreeing with Dr. Chalmers' comments, leaving the impression that he may have said something to the contrary. He didn't - he didn't mention these subjects.

You obviously are a clever writer. It's unfortunate that your skills could not have been put to better use.

Sincerely yours,

Irving J. Selikoff M.D.
Professor

IJS:jlr
cc: Managing Editor, Washington Post
Dr. Thomas C. Chalmers
Dr. David Pomrinse

DEFENDANT'S
EXHIBIT
DX-8846

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Talcum Study Clarified by N.Y. Hospital

By Marian Burros
Washington Post Staff Writer

Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York has issued a statement "to correct certain confusions" about reports of research work conducted at the hospital's Department of Environmental Medicine on the asbestos content of some talcum powders.

The Washington Post reported the findings on March 8.

The statement made Wednesday by the center's president, Dr. Thomas C. Chalmers, said:

- The only baby powder tested that was reported to show asbestos represented less than one per cent of the market and the sample was five years old.
- The talcum powders used in the study "had been purchased more than three years ago."
- Recent analyses by the Food and Drug Administration "have not revealed appreciable amounts of asbestos in talcum powder."

Chalmers also said, "The research work was of the highest technical quality and a significant contribution to the field."

Researchers in the Department of Environmental Medicine have taken exception to some parts of Chalmers' statement.

Arthur Rohl, research assistant in the department who worked on the talc study, said most of the powders had been purchased in 1973, but some were purchased as recently as 1975. Asbestos was found in some of the newer samples, he said, though "there was a decline in the amount."

Samples of 10 talcum powders were also purchased in a drug store in the last 10 days and are being studied now, Rohl said. "Fewer of them contain asbestos and those that do have generally lesser amounts."

Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, chairman of the department and a leading authority on occupational diseases, said the apparent discrepancy between FDA's findings and Mount Sinai's is due to a difference in technique. FDA's methods are not sensitive enough to measure asbestos below a certain level, he said. FDA "uses Differential Thermal Analysis (DTA) and optical microscopy. These are not as sensitive as electron microscopy," the method used at Mt Sinai, Dr. Selikoff said.

FDA's director of cosmetics technology, Heinz J. Klermann, said the methodology the FDA used to examine 76 cosmetic talcs in 1975 "has certain limitations. The level of sensitivity is greater with electron microscopy. DTA will not permit you to determine asbestos at less than half a per cent, possibly one per cent, whereas you can determine it at lower concentrations by using electron microscopy."

Selikoff acknowledged that the cosmetics industry had "gone ahead quietly and improved the talc. But there is a huge chink in their armor. They were dusting people with asbestos all these years before, so what was put in the lungs before is still there.

"I certainly wouldn't want to be dusted with any asbestos. There is no safe level of asbestos known," Selikoff said.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the Department of Labor addressed the same issue in a proposed amendment to regulations governing the limits of asbestos exposure for asbestos workers. In printing the proposal in the Oct. 9, 1975, Federal Register, OSHA said it recognizes that there is no assurance of a safe exposure for a substance with known carcinogenic properties, in this case asbestos, and thus there should be no detectable concentrations."

Ford Axle Plant Struck by UAW

STERLING HEIGHTS, Mich., March 23 (AP) — About 5,100 United Auto Workers union members have struck the Ford Motor Co. plant here, the sole producer of axles and drive shafts for Ford cars.

A UAW spokesman said the union was well aware a prolonged strike could mean layoffs at other Ford plants. A Ford official declined to estimate how long it might be before the strike could lead to shutdowns elsewhere.

Navy Station Hangar Collapses, Injures 5

CORONADO, Calif., March 23 (AP) —An aircraft hangar under construction collapsed with "a terrific crash" today at North Island Naval Station, a spokesman said.

A base public affairs officer said later that five civilian workmen had been injured, one severely and four slightly.

Ambulances and fire units were sent to the scene at the tip of Coronado Island across San Diego Bay.



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The Washington Post reported the findings on March 8.

The statement made Wednesday by the center's president, Dr. Thomas C. Chalmers, said:

* The only baby powder tested that was reported to show asbestos represented less than one per cent of the market and the sample was five years old.

* The talcum powders used in the study "had been purchased more than three years ago."

* Recent analyses by the Food and Drug Administration "have not revealed appreciable amounts of asbestos" in talcum powder.

Chalmers also said, "The research work was of the highest technical quality and a significant contribution to the field."

Researchers in the Department of Environmental Medicine have taken exception to some parts of Chalmers' statement.

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Samples of 10 talcum powders were also purchased in a drug store in the last 10 days and are being studied now, Rohl said. "Fewer of them contain asbestos and those that do have generally lesser amounts."

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FDA's director of cosmetics technology, Heinz J. Eiermann, said the methodology the FDA used to examine 75 cosmetic talcs in 1973 "has certain limitations. The level of sensitivity is greater with electron microscopy. DTA will not permit you to determine asbestos at less than half a per cent, possibly one per cent, whereas you can determine it at lower concentrations by using electron microscopy."

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New Row On Sinai Talc Data

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By MARIAN BURROS
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Sinai Medical Center in New York has issued a statement "to correct certain confusions" about reports of research work conducted at that hospital's Dept. of Environmental Medicine on the asbestos content of some talcum powders.

The Washington Post on March 8 reported the findings, which said that asbestos fibers were discovered in 9 of 19 body and baby powders studied by the researchers.

Asbestos can cause mesothelioma, a rare form of chest and abdominal cancer, and asbestosis, scarring of lung tissue. In 1972 Dr. William J. Nicholson of Mt. Sinai reported that these diseases caused nearly 40 per cent of the deaths of New York-New Jersey asbestos workers.

The statement made Wednesday by the center's president, Dr. Thomas C. Chalmers, said:

¶ The only baby powder tested that was reported to show asbestos represented less than 1 per cent of the market and the sample was five years old.

¶ The talcum powders used in the study "had been purchased more than three years ago."

¶ "Recent analyses by the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] have not revealed appreciable amounts of asbestos [in talcum powder]."

Researchers in the Dept. of Environmental Medicine have taken exception to some parts of Chalmers' statement.

Recent Samples

Arthur Rohl, research assistant in the department who worked on the talc study, said most of the powders had been purchased in 1973, but some were purchased as recently as 1975. Asbestos was found in some of the newer samples, he said, though "there was a decline in the amount."

Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, chairman of the department and a leading authority on occupational diseases, said the apparent discrepancy between FDA's findings and Mt. Sinai's is due to a difference in technique. FDA's methods are not sensitive enough to measure asbestos below a certain level, he said.

Selikoff also took exception to the statement issued by Mt. Sinai's Pediatrics Dept. that baby talc is safe and useful. He said: "I think they will live to regret it."

Dr. Horace H. Hodes, chairman of the department, is a member of the board of directors of Johnson & Johnson's Institute for Pediatric Service. The board advises Johnson & Johnson on disbursement of its funds for pediatric research. Members of the board receive no remuneration. Hodes declined to discuss his department's statement on the safety of baby talc.

87 NEW YORK POST, FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 1978

TITLE!

New Row On Sinai Talc Data

By MARIAN BURROS
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York has issued a statement "to correct certain misunderstandings" about reports of research work conducted at the hospital's Dept. of Environmental Medicine on the asbestos content of some talcum powders.

The Washington Post on March 8 reported the findings, which said that asbestos fibers were discovered in 9 of 13 body and baby powders studied by the researchers.

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NEW items

[submitted from reg. Wash. Post]

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