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SUMMARY OF

OCCUPATIONAL AND RADIOLOGICAL HEALTH SECTIONS ACTIVITIES IN CONTROLLING THE POTENTIAL HEALTH HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SPRAY APPLICATION OF ASBESTOS CONTAINING MATERIALS ON CONSTRUCTION SITES IN PHILADELPHIA

In the fall of 1969, at the request of Air Management Services, the Occupational and Radiological Health Section became involved to a limited extent in the problem of controlling excessive amounts of insulation material containing asbestos generated during the construction of 5 Penn Center, 16th and Market Streets. During this period, a number of inspections were conducted by personnel of the Section directed toward minimizing the exposure of workers to asbestos containing material. Since the Philadelphia Health Dept. has no specific occupational health regulations in this area, the Pennsylvania Health Department, who has the major responsibility for conducting occupational health activities in the City, was requested to investigate and recommend to the Plastering Contracter the steps necessary to meet the pertinent provisions of Pennsylvania Health Department Regulation 432, "Threshold Limits in Places of Employment." Although the plastering contracter involved promised to comply with these provisions, it was soon realized that because of the nature of the process, adequate control of the potential hazard was unsatisfactory. Our initial experience with the spray application of asbestos indicated that:

(1) It was evident that there was a potentially serious occupational health hazard associated with the process, and much control needed.

(2) More information was needed on the extent of the effects of asbestos on humans.

(3) The Department did not posess the trained manpower and expertise needed to sample, analyze, and evaluate environmental and occupational exposure to asbestos.

With this background in mind, a number of meetings and conferences were held with Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, Director, Mount Sinai School of Medicine of the City, University of New York, a foremost expert in studying the problems of asbestos, to review with him in detail the results of his findings and what progress was being made in New York City to minimize the hazard. Dr. Selikoff strongly urged that action be taken now by the Philadelphia Health Department to reduce the exposure of all persons concerned to asbestos at construction sites.

Conclusions reached as a result of our initial contact with Dr. Selikoff were as follows:

(1) There was a potential health risk of unknown magnitude to persons residing or working in the vicinity of buildings being sprayed with asbestos containing material.

(2) There was a real risk of great magnitude to asbestos spray application workers exposed to significant concentration of asbestos.

(3) There was a chronic risk of unknown magnitude to individuals occupying buildings where the plenum chambers have been sprayed with asbestos.

In order to apprise the concerned official bodies, building owners, architects, general contractors, plastering contractors, and union official; a number of meetings were held explaining the nature of the problem, and letters were sent requesting that steps be taken to meet recommended standards in this area. The Chief of the Section was requested to attend meetings of the Board of Health on November 5, 1969, January 7, 1970, and April 1, 1970 to discuss the extent of the problem, and make recommendations to the Board. In recognition of the problem, the Board of Health authorized the staff of the Health Department to develop regulations for controlling

In addition to the Board of Health action, the General Contractor, the Plastering Contractors, the Architect, the building owners are informed when applying for air pollution permits of the requirement for total containment as well as recommended levels of exposure for workers, and the risk to future occupants of the buildings where asbestos containing material is to be sprayed.

In order to assist the Department in evaluating the potential hazards associated with the spray application of asbestos during the construction of a new building, Dr. Selikoff agreed to conduct a survey at the Fidelity Mutual-Girard Trust Building. In each case, the general contractor was urged to contact Dr. Selikoff for the benefit of his expert advice.

More recently, interim orders were adopted by New York City governing the spray application of asbestos followed by Public Hearings on May 25 and 26, 1970, which were attended by personnel of Air Management Services and the Occupational and Radiological Health Section. On July 1, 1970 District Attorney Arlen Spector brought criminal action against the Venzie Corporation as a common nuisance in the spraying of asbestos at the Fidelity Girard Building, and Judge Ethan Allen Doty ruled that Specter had a prima-facie case and ordered Venzie to be held for Grand Jury action.