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CONNECTICUT HEALTH BULLETIN

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LABORATORY



CHECK ASBESTOS EXPOSURES

Diseases related to inhalation of asbestos fibers or dust appears to be among the emerging group that will be known as the illnesses of the 1970's. Research has revealed a recognized occupational health hazard connected with excessive and prolonged inhalation of asbestos dust. A related question has arisen regarding the possible non-occupational health hazard that may result from the presence of asbestos fibers in the following:

- heating insulation*
- brake linings*
- electrical wire — insulation*
- pipe and furnace fittings*
- asbestos textiles—clothing, tile, blankets*
- air filters*
- paint filler*
- shingles, asbestos board*
- steel beam fireproofing and insulation*
- laboratory hoods*

The environmental chemistry section has analyzed industrial air samples and material suspected of containing asbestos for the Occupational Health and Safety Act program in Connecticut administered by the Connecticut Labor Department for several years. Recently there has been an increase in the volume of samples with possible asbestos content submitted for analysis due to the increased awareness of this widespread carcinogenic material.

Samples of ceiling material, insulation, wall-board and air filters have been received from local health departments and schools in Connecticut for

identification of asbestos fibers. All bulk and air samples are pretreated and examined microscopically for evidence of typical asbestos fibers. To further verify the presence of asbestos (usually chrysotile), the sample is treated with a specific refractive index oil and reexamined for a characteristic color. For more difficult samples, spectrographic analysis may be necessary to identify the metal content of the material. Most insulation material has not contained asbestos.

The samples of insulation that have indicated evidence of asbestos, contained a low percentage and were bound within the insulation with filter material and fiber glass. At this time, no health hazard exists from bound asbestos material.

In Connecticut, the major asbestos exposure problems are occupational. However, these are being corrected with altered methods and/or substitution of other materials for asbestos.



PCB SURVEILLANCE STRENGTHENED

Testing for the presence of the chemical group polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) in fish that inhabit Connecticut's fresh and salt water bodies will be expanded and coordinated in 1977. The laboratory division's residue testing unit will receive samples of fish taken from many designated points determined in a comprehensive surveillance plan being arranged by the environmental health services division of the state department of health and the state department of environmental protection.

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's), widely used in commerce and consumer products since 1929 have come to be suspected of causing a number of health problems. People exposed to elevated levels of PCB's are believed subject to more skin lesions, changes in skin pigmentation, and eye discharge. In experimental animals PCB's appear to cause an increased risk of liver damage, cancer, infertility, birth defects and development of newborn offspring with less than normal weight.

The PCB's have been used as heat exchange liquids, dielectrics and in numerous products such as lubricants, prints, plastics, inks, waxes, adhesives, and building materials.

The first evidence of food contamination was reported in 1966 when fish from Swedish waters were found to contain PCB's. During the summer of 1975 New York State found evidence of high concentrations of PCB's in fish taken in the Hudson River. Concentrations of this chemical exceeded the safe limit of 5 p.p.m. (parts per million) set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. As a result, commercial fishing was banned from parts of the Hudson River.

The laboratory's residue testing service began analyzing sample fish for PCB's in August 1975, using sea bass from Black Rock Harbor, Bridgeport and the Saugatuck River, Westport. From August 1975 through December 1976, fish taken from many Connecticut waterways — the Connecticut, Housatonic, Quinnipiac, and Farmington Rivers, Long Island Sound, and Crystal Lake were analyzed. The PCB content ranged from 0.1-5.7 parts per million, with one notable exception in the case of a sucker from Housatonic River with a PCB content measuring 38 p.p.m.