

Gouverneur Workers Said Prone to Cancer

GOUVERNEUR — A study submitted jointly by the state Division of Industrial Hygiene, State University of New York and Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, indicates that workers employed in the Gouverneur talc industry are at least four times more likely to die of lung cancer than the average male in the United States.

Of the 220 local talc workers whose physical status and medical histories were researched — all workers with at least 15 years of exposure to talc dust on the job — some 91 deaths were studied.

Twenty-one per cent of the deaths were due to cancer. Almost 28 per cent were due to heart disease. Pneumoconiosis and its complications accounted for 31 per cent. Accidents and other causes accounted for the remaining percentages.

Dr. Arthur Rohl, speaking on behalf of the Division of Industrial Hygiene, says that, because of lack

of sufficient lapse of time since the study was begun, "the final word" is not in on the possible connection between talc and cancer.

However, Dr. Rohl says that research studies on possible health hazards of various American talcum powders, which contain large percentages of talc, and cosmetics are to get under way and be concluded within several months.

"There's not enough quality control to make the consumer aware that many of these talc products contain asbestos," he says, "and that's the cosmetics...the so-called cream of the cream of the crop selected by manufacturers to represent the cleanest talc in the research we are doing."

"From this," Dr. Rohl says, "we can expect that other talc products may have an even greater asbestos content and find their way into consumers' households unannounced."

"Many surgeons have stopped using talc on their surgical gloves because they've developed skin tumors," Dr. Rohl adds, "Now they use cornstarch instead."

Federal agencies have found preliminary indications that lung cancer may be interrelated to employment in the talc industry. The National Institute of Safety and Health(NIOSH) says experts have observed increased lung cancer in studies of local talc miners. A team of five industrial hygienists, four from NIOSH and one from the Mine Enforcement Safety Administration(MESA) visited Gouverneur in November, 1975, and lab analyses of their findings are now being conducted at NIOSH labs in Ohio.

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