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MEDICINE

Danger of Lung Cancer In Asbestos Workers

➤ ASBESTOS WORKERS are in great danger of lung cancer and asbestosis, a serious lung disease caused by inhaling asbestos dust.

A conference on biological effects of asbestos in New York City, sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences was told that cancer in these workers, either in the chest or elsewhere in the body, is believed related to exposure to asbestos dust.

A study of more than 1,500 asbestos insulation workers in the New York-New Jersey area showed that of the 307 who died during the past 20 years, 40% had died of cancer and 5% to 6% had died of asbestosis.

Of those who started to work with asbestos 40 or more years ago, 94% gave X-ray evidence of asbestosis, Dr. I. J. Selikoff of Mount Sinai Hospital, New York, said.

Another study, reported by Dr. W. J. Smither of the Asbestos Research Council, London, revealed a definite increase in the occurrence of lung cancer among workers in an east end asbestos factory in London.

A surprising discovery, Dr. Smither said, was that a relatively high number of cancers started in the pleura and peritoneum, the membranes lining the chest and abdominal cavities, and covering the organs within these cavities.

Asbestos dust is also affecting the lungs of city dwellers, regardless of whether or not they are asbestos workers, Dr. J. G. Thomson of the University of Cape Town Medical School, Cape Town, South Africa, pointed out.

Autopsies of 500 persons over 15 years of age in Cape Town and 500 more in Miami, Fla., showed asbestos "bodies" in many lung smears. (Asbestos bodies are asbestos fibers coated with an iron-containing substance.)

The use of asbestos has increased greatly in the past 50 years. Asbestos cement products such as pipes, flat and corrugated sheets and shingles, manufactured in most countries of the world, make up the largest use of asbestos. The second largest use of asbestos is in the manufacture of asphalt and vinyl asbestos floor tile.

• Science News Letter, 86:276 October 31, 1964

PUBLIC HEALTH

Urge TB Checks for Department Store Santas

➤ DEPARTMENT STORE Santa Clauses should have tuberculin tests or chest X-rays because of their intimate contact with young children, the National Tuberculosis Association warns. Last year, at least one child developed tuberculosis after climbing up on the lap of a department store Santa Claus to ask for presents.

The association has issued a special Christmas season message to all department stores and other retail establishments employing Santa Clauses to be sure these jolly Saint Nicks are as healthy as they look.

• Science News Letter, 86:276 October 31, 1964

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