JMEA 5099

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

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Subject: Speech on environmental and occupational health. Asbestos mentioned. Of interest and importance.

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Evaluation: The speaker, an official of the Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Service, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, has not previously discussed asbestos. In this presentation he cites asbestos exposure as one of the occupational health hazards where greater progress must be made. He implies that insufficient protection is given to workers in the coal, textile and asbestos industries. Only those pages mentioning asbestos are attached.

Author: Hansen, C.A.

Unpublished: Presented at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, Philadelphia, November 11, 1969.

Title: "Prospectus for Environmental Improvement: The Environmental Control Administration and Occupational Health"

Summary: As given above.

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Prospectus for Environmental Improvement: the Environmental Control Administration and Occupational Health

CHRIS A. HANSEN
Assistant Surgeon General
Public Health Service
Commissioner, Environmental Control Administration
Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Service
U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Remarks for a panel discussion on "The Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Service: A New Approach to Environmental Health", Engineering and Sanitation Section, the American Public Health Association, Philadelphia, November 11, 1969

People are not satisfied with their environment. They see haphazard, uncontrolled urban sprawl, and they don't like it. They smell, and choke on, the smog that blankets our cities. They see our lakes and rivers deteriorating into sludge and slime. They recognize the direct connection between crowded, rat-infested urban housing, and the explosion of our cities with crime.

People demand a halt. Their concern is part of the social and political unrest of our times. And people know that the growing reservoir of science and technology can make environmental quality possible. Every segment of the Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Service is designed to help achieve that control. To talk about environmental improvement is to talk about our concern for people and basic human values.

When President Nixon established the Environmental Quality Council

We recently surveyed the manufacturing plants of a large metropolitan area and found that three out of four plant managers considered their plants to be free of hazard. But the industrial hygienist making the survey actually found a reverse proportion; he found potential hazards in three out of four plants!

We have found extreme carelessness in the handling of hazardous substances that have been well known for generations: lead, mercury, carbon tetrachloride. Control procedures break down, deteriorate, or are simply ignored. In the Space Age, workers still suffer from poisons that have been controllable since the Middle Ages.

Lung diseases caused by inhalation of dust in coal or other mines and from the inhalation of fibers in asbestos plants and textile mills have only recently reached the point of national concern. Their causal mechanisms and their methods of development in the human body are still imperfectly known. The numbers of workers affected is still a matter of learned dispute. But there is no dispute that they are prime occupational hazards and that something must be done, and done quickly, to control them.

Some 38,000 coal miners suffer from coal workers pneumoconiosis, or "black lung," and estimates of the total number of active and retired miners affected range up to 125,000.

An estimated 8,000 to 9,000 cotton textile workers suffer from byssinosis, also called "brown lung," or "white lung."

Asbestos workers have a lung cancer rate seven times higher than the rest of us. Airborne asbestos fibers cause asbestosis, cancer of the lung

and of the pleura. The hazard applies not only to workers in asbestos mines and mills, but to construction workers who handle asbestos materials and even to people living near an asbestos mill or a construction site where asbestos is being used. This brings the total number of people exposed to the asbestos fiber hazard up in the millions.

ECA's Program in Occupational Health

ECA's Bureau of Occupational Safety and Health is working hard on all of these problems, both in our own laboratories and through research performed by others under our grant-in-aid program. To cite a few:

-- The Bureau provided the scientific basis for the coal dust standard recently recommended to the Department of the Interior and incorporated in the Federal Coal Mine Safety bill now before the Congress. This proposed standard is 3 milligrams of dust per cubic meter of air -- lower than some wanted.

-- The Bureau's research led to establishment of standards for radioactive contaminants in uranium mines, but the power to control and enforce was not given to us. It is expected that this standard will significantly reduce the number of cases of lung cancer among uranium miners, due to inhalation of radon and uranium decay products. We estimate that 600 to 1,100 miners will die of exposure suffered before the standards were adopted.

-- More research is needed in all industries where harmful dust particles or toxic airborne materials are known to exist. But this we know: the minimum levels, the tolerable exposure established by such research must take into account the worker's