

LABOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM

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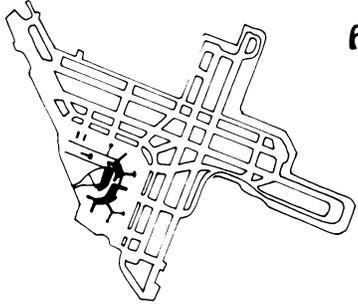
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HEALTH AND SAFETY SHOPTALK: Reports of Local Unions

Bob Fowler

One of the functions of the LOHP is to promote the formation of local union health and safety committees in Northern California. Additionally, we consult with the local union committees in an attempt to help them maintain effectivity in their daily operations.

In our first year of operation, we have witnessed the formation of over 50 local union health and safety committees. Each one has experienced their own individual forming and growing pains. Each one has also developed their own strategies in dealing with the resolution of health and safety hazards in their workplace. In the future issues of Monitor, I will use this space to report on the activities of the established local union health and safety committees.



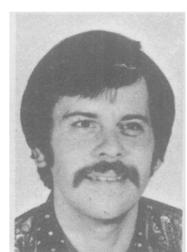
Airport Labor Coalition for Safety and Health

P.O. Box 8145
San Francisco International Airport
San Francisco, CA 94128

The Airport Labor Coalition for Safety and Health (ALCSH) is closing the books on their first full year of operation. A brainchild of IAM Local 1781 Health and Safety Committee chairman Rich Jackson, the coalition was formed to settle occupational health and safety problems common among the over 20,000 airport workers at the huge San Francisco Airport complex. Rich Jackson contacted union health and safety representatives from the many air carriers at SFIA and discussed his idea. The response was encouraging so he called a meeting in September of 1974. Thirteen labor representatives showed up at the meeting and



Rich Jackson



John Massetti

the coalition was off and running. Subsequent meetings resulted in election of officers, adoption of by-laws and formation of sub-committees. ALCSH had immediate success in scheduling meetings with the Airport Commission to present, discuss and resolve their recommendations for improvements in health and safety related items. ALCSH Chairman, Rich Jackson, explained to LOHP, "most of our health and

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ILWU LOCAL 6

On July 7, more than 150 members of ILWU Warehousemen, Local 6, stopped work at Heublein in Menlo Park and the workers met in a continuous safety meeting outside the plant gate. The events that led up to this meeting and the current situation are described below.

June 17: A woman with 16 years at Heublein refused to work on an unsafe labeler that had earlier caught fire and been replaced by a makeshift system that further exposed workers to hot glue. She pointed out that both the contract and the law gave any worker the right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions. When the company tried to force other women to work on the machine, the Head Steward pulled all workers into the lunchroom to discuss their rights under the contract and law. In less than 10 minutes the company fixed the machine and everyone returned to work.

A meeting was set up for July 2 between Heublein members of Local 6 and Curt McClain, president of Local 6, to discuss the incident. But on July 1, the company fired the Head Steward and production steward and stewardess (who also were the elected Grievance Committee), claiming they had called an unauthorized work stoppage.

July 2: After a July 2nd meeting between the company and the union in which the company refused to reinstate the three stewards, the membership voted to start a "continuous safety meeting" outside the plant until the stewards were rehired and safety conditions improved. Production was stopped in the plant during the 2 week safety meeting and the determination of the workers to fight became stronger. Many of the women, who have the worst working conditions in the plant, took up leadership positions.

July 17: The company went to court to get a TRO (Temporary Restraining Order), which was granted by Judge Stanley Weigel. Judge Weigel refused to have the stewards reinstated (their case is pending arbitration) but did order that unsafe equipment not be used, shutting down 16% of production. On July 30 the com-

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HEALTH HAZARD ALERTS

NIOSH Seeks Info on Exposure to Propane Sultone

NIOSH is seeking information about workers exposed to propane sultone following notification by Shell Chemical Company that the substance causes cancer in animals.

Shell recently notified NIOSH that it was ceasing production of the chemical, which has been used in film, textile, and metal pickling industries.

NIOSH in turn asked for a list of Shell's customers so that the Institute could continue surveillance of workers who had been exposed to propane sultone.

Shell has already recommended that full protective clothing and self-contained breathing apparatus be used to avoid body contact with propane sultone and its vapor.

NIOSH also requested 20 companies which use the material to send information on the number of workers exposed, the length of their exposures, descriptions of the specific processes in which the substance is used, and names and addresses of other companies to which propane sultone or products containing unreacted propane sultone were shipped.

—*Job Safety and Health*

AIRPORT—Cont'd

safety requests to the various management groups at San Francisco International Airport are merely repeats of requests made over the years by various union individuals or concerned workers. The Coalition affords the individuals an opportunity to present their requests through a highly structured representative body. We have more leverage and will continue to gain strength due to our policy of open membership to all special interest groups at the airport complex."

ALCS Recording Secretary John Massetti, who is also the grievance committeeman for the IAM members at Northwest Orient Air Lines, explained to LOHP, "the Airport Commission appears to be consistently more responsive to health and safety complaints raised by ALCSH than they were before we existed. We have also had a high degree of support and cooperation from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors."

A general consensus opinion of the ALCSH members indicates optimism in continuing successful resolution of their health and safety recommendations. Following are highlights of health and safety improvements at the San Francisco International Airport resulting from Airport Labor Coalition for Safety and Health recommendations.

1. A 24 hour medical facility for all airport workers with two mini-ambulances equipped with full life-support systems.

2. Standardized baggage cart towing procedures to eliminate existing unsafe conditions created by lack of uniformity among carriers.

3. New ground traffic routes established that reduce the possibility of aircraft collisions with ground equipment.

4. New airport traffic enforcement procedures resulting in a higher degree of pedestrian safety.

5. Push back and tow out procedures for aircraft loading between concourses that eliminates the many accidents caused by high velocity of engine exhaust in addition to reducing the worker exposure to jet exhaust fumes.

HEALTH HAZARD ALERTS

Manganese Poisoning: New Occupational Disease

Two cases of manganese poisoning have been reported recently in California—the first time this rare occupational disease has been reported in the state.

Manganese is a chemical used principally in the manufacture of metal alloys, dry-cell batteries, fertilizers and various chemicals. While it is an essential chemical in human tissue, too much manganese in the system leads to manganese poisoning, a serious deterioration of the central nervous system. Symptoms of the disease include clumsiness in walking, speech disturbances, drowsiness, depression and crying spells.

Manganese poisoning seldom appears until after several years exposure to the chemical. Unless detected early, recovery is slow and often incomplete.

—*California Medical Association*

ILWU—Cont'd

pany got a preliminary injunction removing the restriction on the equipment. Again Judge Weigel refused to put the stewards back, but did order the company to continue paying their medical benefits. The safety committee decided not to fight the TRO and recommended the membership return to work as one.

Meanwhile a complaint was filed with CAL-OSHA about the hazardous conditions in the plant. However, since the inspection by CAL-OSHA was done during the plant shut-down the company was only cited for very few violations.

The three discharged stewards won a victory of sorts when they got the right to their unemployment benefits. And the remainder of the membership now have a higher level of consciousness about the company, the courts and government. They are determined to keep the struggle going until the plant is as safe as it should be and the stewards are reinstated. In the words of one Local 6 member: "Although the walkout forced the company to make improvements in safety in the plant, the return of the three stewards is necessary for a complete victory in this battle . . ."

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STAFF ASSOCIATES
Morris Davis, Editor

Janet Bertinuson
Gene Darling
Bob Fowler

Andrea Hricko
Leo Seidlitz
Donald Whorton, Director

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Andrea Hricko

California Workers: Do you know your legal rights to information about health hazards at your job? Cal/OSHA is charged with enforcing provisions under the state law which require your employer to:

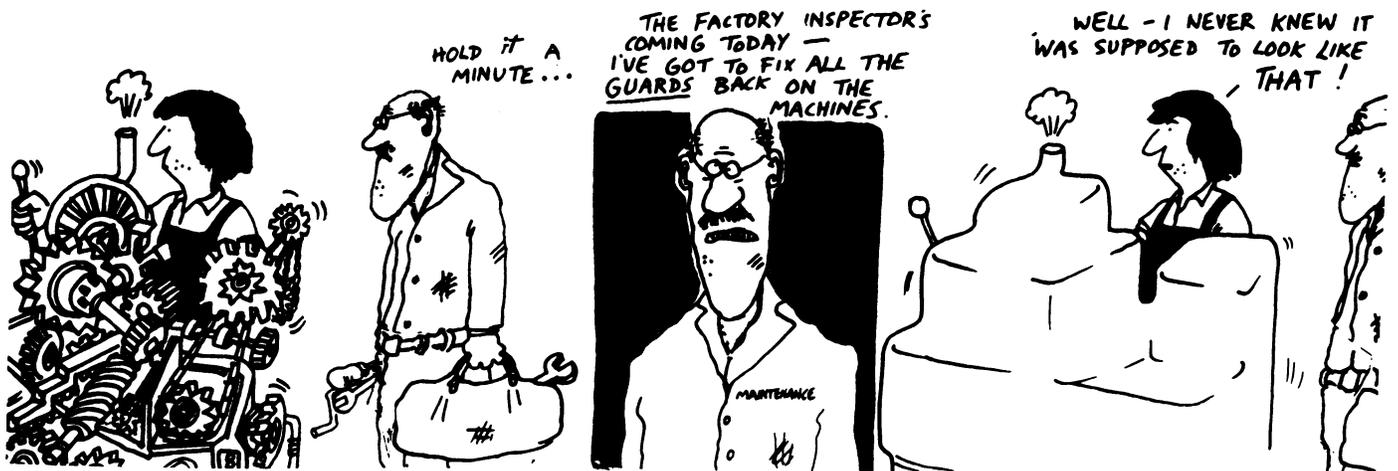
- **Notify you** in writing if you have been (or are being) exposed to toxic materials at levels exceeding the applicable OSHA standard.
- **Inform you** of action being taken to correct the hazardous situation.
- **Show you** accurate records of your exposure to toxic materials when you request them.

In January, 1974, Cal/OSHA published emergency rules to implement these provisions of the law but the regulations have not been implemented since their publication. Few, if any, employers have been complying with the rules. Furthermore, to our knowledge, Cal/OSHA inspectors have not cited any employers for their failure to notify workers that they have been

standard, order, or special order, the employer of the affected employee must promptly notify any employee so affected in writing of the fact that the employee has been exposed, and of the corrective action being taken by the employer.

340.3. Employee Access to Accurate Records. When any employee has been exposed to any potentially toxic or hazardous substances, so categorized by any standard, order or special order of the Division of Industrial Safety, upon receipt of a written request from that employee, the employer shall provide access to accurate records of that employee's exposure to the potentially toxic or hazardous substances to the affected employee or his representative.

Second, if your plant is inspected by Cal/OSHA, the inspector must cite the employer if he fails to comply with these provisions of the law. Thus, if your employ-



From Survival Kit

“over-exposed” or to show workers their exposure records.

This situation could change dramatically if workers began to demand their legal rights. Cal/OSHA's reluctance to cite employers for violation of these rules is expected to change with the new administration of the state program. In addition, Governor Brown's new assistant on health and safety, Dr. Fred Ottoboni, has told MONITOR that he intends to see that these important regulations begin to be implemented.

How can workers exercise these rights? First, workers are urged to file complaints if their employers violate any of these provisions of the law or of the regulations. If a complaint is filed, the following regulations from Title 8 of the California Administrative Code should be cited in #5 on the complaint form:

340.2. Notification to Employee of Exposure Required. Whenever any employee has been or is being exposed to toxic materials or harmful physical agents in concentrations or at levels exceeding those prescribed by applicable stan-

er has failed to notify you that you had been (or are being) exposed to toxic substances at levels above those allowable by the state standard, then the inspector is obligated to include this violation of Section 340.2 on the citation. Similarly, if your employer has denied you access to monitoring records which show your exposure to toxic materials, then the inspector is obligated to cite your employer under Section 340.3.

In the event that the Cal/OSHA inspector fails to cite an employer who is in violation of these rules, then an employee can file a CASPA form with the Federal government. This **Complaint Against State Program Administration** will trigger an investigation by the Federal OSHA office.

These rights can be very powerful tools in protecting workers' health and safety—but only if they are exercised. If there are any questions concerning these provisions, please contact the Labor Occupational Health Program. We would appreciate having workers inform us of their experiences in having these provisions of the law enforced.

King of the Road—At What Price

Leo Seidlitz, Ph.D.

Flames from blazing gasoline tanker trucks involved in a chain reaction crash on the L.A. freeway. Two jackknifing trucks contributed to the fiery mess.



AP wire photo

The professional truck driver is confined, for much of the working day, to a compartment which is at the center of a host of serious health and safety problems. In the previous issue of *Monitor*, alarming figures concerning injuries among truckers were described. For example, the disabling injury rate is 3 times greater and the job-death rate is 7 times greater for truckers than for other workers covered by Workers' Compensation.

What is the source of these injuries? Is the truck driver exposed to other hazards which may result in long-term illnesses and disabilities that do not show up in any of these governmental statistics? What is the cumulative effect of these hazards on the safety and well-being of today's trucker?

Dangers of the Highway

Added to the dangers of just driving on our streets and highways, truckers have additional burdens which greatly increase their risks. Dangerous cargoes, unsafe equipment, overloaded vehicles, demanding and fatiguing work schedules and the pressure of mileage-pay or sales commissions increase the probability and severity of roadway accidents. Furthermore, these factors together with other hazards described later, contribute to increase in psychological stress.

Rigorous and taxing work schedules have compelled many truckers to use stimulants such as amphetamines or caffeine. The fact that most of the long-distance truckers' pay is set by mileage covered generates a self-induced pressure that compounds the destructive effects of the work schedule. This situation was eased somewhat by the imposition of the 55 mile speed limit but only at the expense of the trucker's income. (As this limit is being increasingly violated, the trucker is faced with a new dilemma, earn and burn or slow down and starve?)

Some motor carriers not only knowingly overload their vehicles past safe braking, tire and handling limits, but also issue detailed instructions to their drivers on how "to run around highway patrol scales"

in order to avoid detection. The passage by Congress this year of legislation raising the weight limitation from 73,280 to 80,000 lbs. will drastically increase the severity of this problem. (Driver fatigue increases with loading; trucks that were marginally safe under the old limit will be overstrained under the new one. Existing braking capacity may be underutilized for fear of the increased likelihood of jackknifing with the heavier load.)

The list of dangerous cargoes hauled by truck is too lengthy to detail here, but it includes flammable, corrosive, explosive or toxic materials which would increase the probability of serious injury or death in case of collision or upset. Since every trip has a beginning and an end, the loading and unloading of these hazardous materials also present dangers. Even where the trucker does not have primary responsibility for these operations, the driver is usually in the vicinity, exposed to the risks of accident and also, in some situations, to toxic fumes during these critical operations.

Physical Stresses

Noise and vibration are the two major physical stresses imposed upon the truck driver's body. These are often accompanied by excess heat and the glare of artificial light or the sun, contributing to the fatigue induced by these agents.

The legal standard for noise is now 90 decibels (db) for an 8-hour day, but at that level over a 30-year period more than 15% of exposed workers will suffer some degree of hearing loss, while more than 40% will become deaf at 100 db. Several series of tests have been made on truck noise levels during actual operational runs. In one series, the noise level was 95 db or greater 90% of the time and 100 db or greater 50% of the time. In another series the level was 90 db or greater more than 50% of the time. Even in the quieter series, many trucks could not be driven as much as 4 hours/day without violating established regulations.

Permanent hearing loss is produced gradually over a period of years of exposure. Temporary hearing loss, however, can be produced in a few hours. This introduces a new element of danger since the temporary hearing loss occurs during drivers' working hours, decreasing alertness to highway dangers.

"Noise and Vibration Are the Two Major Physical Stresses Imposed Upon the Truck Driver . . ."

It may be thought that it would be expensive or inefficient to design and build trucks in which the cab noise level was moderate and that to rework existing trucks to reduce noise levels would be prohibitively expensive. In 1972, Gulf Oil Company made a series of modifications in its existing trucks (4-cycle diesels), which had previously exceeded 90 db for 30% of driving time. By the application of simple techniques, the drivers' exposure time over 90 db was reduced to between zero and 8%, depending upon the particular material used. The cost per vehicle was less than \$200! After these tests on existing vehicles, the company included a noise specification in all its new truck purchases. A maximum level of 82 db was obtained for an added cost of \$200 in the new trucks. Therefore, renovation expenses should not be a major deterrent for corrective measures.

Another problem is vibration of the truck which causes the driver's body to vibrate as a whole. This induces fatigue as the driver's muscles try to reduce its effect and may be a contributive factor to lower back pain. The gastrointestinal tract and the kidneys may also be damaged from long term exposure.

A corollary example would be a recent study of interstate bus drivers. The significant findings were an increase in hypertension, plus a variety of musculoskeletal and digestive disorders. One other conclusion of the study is that the deterioration of health does not depend on the age of the driver but *matches closely with the number of years of driving experience!*

Chemical Hazards and Air Pollution

As stated before, the driver may be exposed to toxic fumes at the docks during loading and unloading. Under certain circumstances depending upon the cargo and the condition of the container, fumes may reach the cab during transport. Almost invariably, however, the cab will contain fumes of carbon monoxide, diesel (or gasoline) fuel, lead and many other products of the internal combustion engine.

"... Renovation Expenses Should Not be a Major Deterrent for Corrective Measures"

One trucker wrote to a group investigating trucking working conditions:

"The fumes are killing us. The motor sits in the cab by me and the 'dog house' covering has not sufficiently covered the motor. You can look through the floor board and see the ground from inside the cab. There is a peculiar fume along with the regular diesel fume that is causing us to be dizzy and I know one driver that passed out because of this. You can get out on a lunch break and can hardly walk to the restaurant but once you get out for a few minutes you are all right until you get started again. The engines are so full of diesel fuel, that when you get to the end of your trip your socks and underwear are as black as pure oil. If you have to vomit, it is just like draining an oil pan on a car."

Chronic, long-term exposure to low concentrations of carbon monoxide (CO) can lead to a sense of pressure in the head or other forms of headache, dizziness, weakness in the legs, fatigue and lack of energy. There may be deterioration of mental sharpness, visual sensitivity, reaction time, hand-eye coordination and other behavioral characteristics. Workers are less able to respond quickly and accurately to the demands of their job and, therefore, accident rates increase. By reducing the circulation of oxygen to the brain, heart, blood vessels and kidneys, CO may produce long-term damage to these organs. Diesel engines, *if properly maintained*, should not emit significant amounts of CO; in contrast, gasoline-fueled engines always emit carbon monoxide.

Apparently, there have been no systematic studies of the contamination of the air in a truck cab under actual operating conditions. Most of these contaminants can be kept out of the cab by proper design of the cab and engine. Most of the remainder of the pollutants can be controlled by filtration and purification of the air.

Psychologic Stress

The hazards of highway travel as an occupation can take their toll both in the physical injuries inflicted and in the mental stress which their constant presence induces. The environmental stresses (physical and chemical) interact with the highway factors so that the combination is worse than just the sum of its parts.

The resulting state of affairs was examined in detail in a psychological study of Teamster Union members in the Pontiac-Detroit region. One of the impressive conclusions was that 28 percent of the pre-retirement men (with twenty or more years of driving) who were tested and interviewed show moderate to severe problems of chronic anxiety and depression.

Although such studies are not totally conclusive, it is a well-known fact that different occupations have different rates of psychosomatic illnesses. These types of studies indicate the need for further research on how to reduce job stress, thus improving physical and/or emotional health.

RECENT EVENTS

Lead Exposure Affect Sperm Production

A recent foreign study has shown that the ability to produce sperm is damaged in workers exposed to lead. The study, reported in the August, 1975 issue of *Archives of Environmental Health*, was conducted on lead storage battery workers by a team of scientists at the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Bucharest, Romania. One hundred male workers with an average age of 38.5 years and an average of an 8.5 year history of exposure to lead were chosen. In addition, 50 technicians and office workers who worked adjacent to the plant were included in the study.

The study design divided the workers into four groups: group 1: those with symptoms and lead levels high enough to be considered poisoned; group 2: those with minimal or occasional symptoms and moderate lead levels; group 3: those with no symptoms and mild lead levels; and group 4: those with no symptoms and low lead levels. Blood and urine tests were performed to determine the amount of lead exposure. Only the blood lead levels will be discussed in this report.

Symptoms of lead poisoning can be placed into three categories: mild and reversible; moderate and usually reversible; and severe and usually not reversible. Symptoms in the first category would include increased fatigue, loss of physical endurance, difficulty sleeping, headaches, generalized aching of the bones and muscles, constipation, vague stomach pains, and loss of appetite. The second category would include problems like anemia, severe stomach pains (sometimes mimicking the signs of acute appendicitis), moderate to severe muscle weakness, damage to the nerves, and difficulty with thinking and other functions of the brain. The third and most severe set of symptoms include problems like permanent, complete or partial paralysis of an arm, leg, or both, permanent brain damage, and severe non-reversible damage to the kidneys.

As previously mentioned, the workers were divided into four groups:

- Group 1—all had evidence of longterm or chronic lead poisoning including some of the symptoms mentioned above. However, none had severe stomach pains or brain difficulties. The blood lead levels in these men averaged 75 mg%. (Number of micrograms of lead per 100 milliliters of blood).
- Group 2—few had any complaints of the common symptoms of lead poisoning and the blood leads averaged 53 mg%.
- Group 3—none had any complaints of lead poisoning and the blood lead levels averaged 41 mg%.
- Group 4—none had any symptoms and the blood lead levels averaged 23 mg%.

Each of the men voluntarily gave a sperm sample for the investigators to examine and evaluate for the amount of sperm produced, the activity of the sperm, and for the number of abnormal sperm cells produced. Figure 1 shows the percentage of men with one or more abnormal results of their sperm evaluation. It is important to note that an abnormality of any of the criteria—quantity, quality or motility—of the sperm may cause infertility.

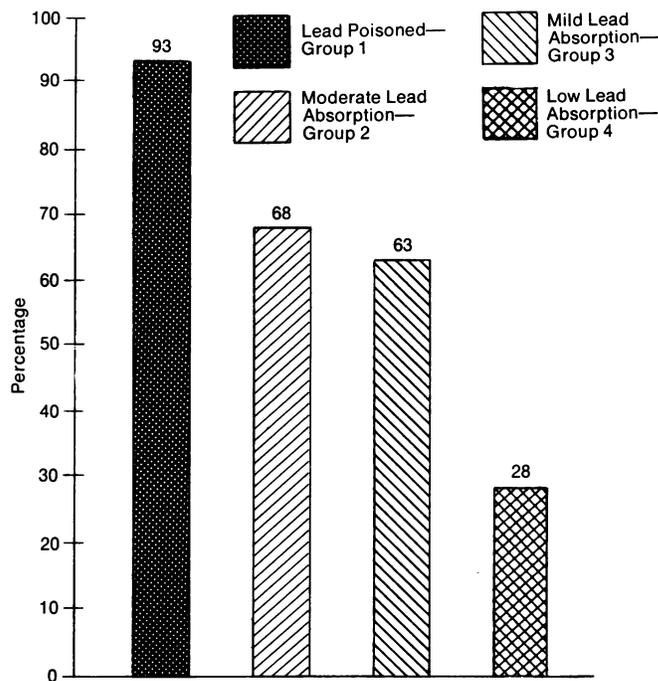


Figure 1
Percentage of Men With One or More Abnormal Sperm Tests

The authors concluded that significant damage to sperm production can occur to the worker even if his blood lead level is below 80 mg% (which some authorities in the U.S. have tried to propagate as the safe level.) Even workers with moderately increased amounts of lead absorbed show evidence of damage to sperm production capabilities. This leads to an increased inability to be fertile or to produce healthy sperm cells. The authors stated that the sperm problem appears to be a direct toxic effect of the lead and is not related to some other malfunction of the body.

This study points out the importance for monitoring lead levels in workers that are exposed to the substance. It also demonstrates that the "acceptable" level of lead in the blood must be considerably lowered, since many workers with lead levels as low as 40-50 mg% are having serious adverse health effects.

Copper, Lead and Zinc Smelters Related to Lung Cancer

The risk of developing lung cancer is significantly higher for persons who live in areas near copper, lead or zinc smelters, according to a study published recently by researchers from the National Cancer Institute. The study, which was published in the July 26th issue of the British medical journal, *Lancet*, also showed the potential cancer danger from industrial emissions both inside and outside of manufacturing plants. The researchers' report concluded that:

— 36 counties which had smelting or refining facilities, showed lung cancer rates for males to be 17 percent higher and 15 percent higher for females than in the rest of the United States.

— In the three counties having the largest population of individuals engaged in smelter or refinery work, lung cancer deaths were 92 percent higher in males and 36 percent higher in females over the average for the rest of the country.

The primary reason for the high cancer rates around the smelters and refineries is due to emissions of *inorganic arsenic*, a byproduct of the smelting process for copper, lead and zinc.

— *The Washington Post*

Asbestos Disease Spreads to Workers' Families

In a study of 326 family contacts of former asbestos factory workers completed by the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, it has been found that 35 percent had x-ray abnormalities characteristic of asbestos exposure. The data was presented by Dr. Henry Anderson to the Conference on Occupational Carcinogens and sponsored by the Society for Occupational and Environmental Health.

The family members potentially affected included all in the household; it was not simply the wife of the worker, who would share dust from her husband's clothes before washing. Also affected were children, brothers and sisters, as well as wives.

The workers were employed at a factory that manufactured **amosite insulation** material, often for use in naval ships, but also widely used in power plants and industrial insulation. It operated from 1941 through 1954. Many of the workers whose families later developed signs of asbestos exposure were employed for relatively short periods of time. However, the dust exposures to the family members could have been longer. Asbestos, once in the house, is difficult to remove, and exposures could continue long after the end of the husband's or father's employment. Asbestos dust has been found still present in households of these former factory workers **20 years after closure of the plant.**

The results of this study dramatize the need for stringent dust control and cleanup in situations where asbestos is used. **Under no circumstances should dusty clothes be brought into the home, even to be put into the washing machine. Such clothes should be washed separately, preferably by a commercial industrial laundry service equipped to handle asbestos contaminated work clothes.**

For family contacts who suspect they have been exposed to considerable household contamination, medical surveillance is in order. The family physician should be told the exposure history so that x-ray and chest examinations and subsequent medical problems can be closely monitored for possible symptoms of past asbestos exposure at home.

—Press Associates, Inc.

Decibel Debacle—Labor's Young Militia Battles Industry

EDITOR'S NOTE: The new OSHA noise standard was proposed in October, 1974. Since that time the battle lines have been clearly drawn. On one side are the unions and EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) fighting for an 85 decibel (db) limit. In the other camp, OSHA and employers are arguing for the proposed standard of 90 decibels. On the surface a difference of 5 decibels hardly seems worth fighting over. But 90 db is actually three times louder than 85. Union and EPA representatives point out that 85 db is the maximum level that will still protect most workers; a limit that is at the same time feasible with present noise-abatement technology. OSHA and industry, however, argue in terms of dollars, saying that an increase from 13.5 billion to 30 billion dollars would be necessary for employers to comply with the 85 as opposed to 90 decibel level. There is substantial evidence that these estimates are highly over exaggerated.

As hearings on the standard continue in Washington, the new representatives of labor are being heard

from. Acting on behalf of the rank and file in the noise contest is an army of young committed men and women with expertise in the field of occupational safety and health.

The corporate guns are aimed at these dedicated, college-trained young people who are building a record in their economic and scientific testimony which may alter the standard of permissible noise.

Coordinating the union witnesses is Joe Hafkenshiel, age 29, Swarthmore graduate, with a masters degree in business administration. Like his colleagues, he is completely unawed by the high-priced legal talent on the corporate side. He is on the staff of the Communications Workers of America.

For the Textile Workers Union, Eric Frumin, 26, spars with the textile manufacturers. George Mernick, 23, talks for the Teamsters Union. At the age of 26, Steve Wodka of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, is a pioneer in the field of noise abatement. Dan



Steve Wodka, OCAW

MacLeod, 27, a graduate industrial hygienist, is the reliable technician of the Auto Workers.

Claudia Prieve, 26, represents the Steelworkers. The other day, Ruth Ruttenberg, 27, an assistant professor at Howard, talking for the AFL-CIO, delivered a scathing paper, contending that noise abatement technology has attained a stage which makes the 85-decibel level not only achievable but at a cost far less than the resisting employers claim.

For two hours, this brilliant young woman was subjected to a relentless cross examination by the corporate lawyers. She parried and thrust until finally her attackers had to cease and desist.

This is the sort of generally unobserved action that is going on in one place in Washington. It's not always on Capitol Hill at House and Senate hearings where the drama of decision-making is unrolled. Decisive battles occur often in more modest surroundings. For labor the gut fight is a hand-to-hand confrontation between dedicated, young intellectual foot soldiers and the well-armed forces of industrial power.

—The Washington Post

Janet Bertinuson Joins LOHP



Janet Bertinuson, who has an M.S. in Environmental Health/Industrial Hygiene from the University of Cincinnati, has joined the LOHP staff as Industrial Hygiene Coordinator. As a former staff member of the OCAW International Union Health and Safety Office she carried out educational, training and testing programs, prepared educational materials, and acted as a resource person for OCAW membership. Janet is a member of the American Industrial Hygiene Association.

DOCTOR'S COLUMN

Dear Doc: I work in a plastics manufacturing plant and have to use epoxies. Is it harmful?

Epoxy compounds were introduced into the workplace in the late 1940's and have allowed for many innovations and uses of plastics that are very common in today's world. Epoxy compounds are not without their problems, especially to those who must work with them.

Epoxy compounds are excellent adhesives that have the capability to bond one material to another in an almost unbreakable manner. They are also used in casting compounds for potting and encapsulation of electrical equipment, in laminating resins for fibrous glass, in reinforced plastics, and as a protective coating. Workers in any of these industries that produce plastics may be potentially exposed. Other occupations with potential exposures include: adhesive makers, aircraft panel makers, appliance sprayers, automobile body repairers, automobile prototype makers, body solder makers, brick masons, cement patchers, electric equipment makers, electricians, electron microscopists, gluers, highway maintenance workers, laminators, paint makers, paint sprayers, pattern makers, tank coaters, tile setters, and tool and die makers.

The major hazards are due to the irritant and sensitizing properties of these compounds. Usually, the skin is most commonly involved but the lungs can also be affected, depending upon the industrial process or the use of the compounds.

In some studies up to 40% of all workers exposed to epoxy compounds have developed skin problems or dermatitis. These compounds have two different effects on the skin: one is a direct irritant like spilling an acid or alkaline substance on the skin with resultant redness, soreness, or development of sores or rashes (contact dermatitis). The second is a sensitizer effect which is similar to poison oak or ivy in that once the person becomes sensitized to the substance, (s)he will immediately break out or have a terrible itching reaction to any contact with the substance. (Allergic dermatitis). The lungs can become irritated just like the skin, eyes, mouth, etc. However, in many instances, when the lungs become irritated, they will fill up with fluid and breathing becomes difficult to impossible. If the effect on the lungs is a sensitizing one, then a condition is developed which is similar to asthma. This will cause shortness of breath whenever the person exposed attempts to inhale any epoxy fumes or dust. Also, associated with the shortness of breath, the

**Institute of Industrial Relations,
University of California
Center for Labor Research and Education**

2521 Channing Way
Berkeley, CA 94720

Address Correction Requested

worker may notice that large red welts will break out on the skin.

Some people who are sensitized to poison oak can break out just by being in the vicinity of the leaves and not necessarily in direct contact. The same is true for epoxy compounds. Not only is the skin irritated but also the eyes, mouth and throat can become involved. If the job involves exposure to fumes, caused by heated epoxy compounds, pulverized small particles or dust, then the lungs can become involved in the same manner as the skin: irritation and sensitization.

How can you protect yourself from the effects of these compounds? Isolation of the compounds is the best method. One should never touch or have these compounds come into contact with the skin, eyes, mouth or lungs. If dusts and fumes are a problem, then an adequate ventilation system must be installed to eliminate these dusts or fumes. Protective equipment like gloves and aprons should be worn by those involved with the substances. Protective creams have been used but they offer much less protection than do gloves. One last point to remember is that even though most epoxy compounds do not have an established threshold limit value, they are still hazardous and should be treated as such.

—D.W.

• On June 24, 1975, a meeting was held in Sacramento with Mario Obledo, Secretary of the California State Department of Health and Welfare. The purpose of the meeting was to explore various methods of improving the identification, evaluation and control of occupational health problems in the state of California.

On August 11, 1975, a proposal was submitted to Secretary Obledo by Robert Fowler - Labor Occupational Health Program; James Dahlgren, M.D. - Labor Environment Institute; and Robert Merliss, M.D. - occupational health physician. The major areas covered included: (1) recommendations for improvement of the Bureau of Occupational Health; (2) occupational health training for physicians; (3) a physicians' newsletter on occupational health; (4) establishment of laboratories for determining the presence of occupational diseases; and (5) establishment of an industrial materials testing laboratory.

A subsequent meeting was held in Los Angeles on August 15th with Drs. Fred Hodges and A. C. Hollister from the State Department of Health to review the contents of the proposal. Indications are that these efforts will eventually culminate in the Department of Health taking a more direct role towards improving occupational health in the state of California.

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