Letters to the Editor

Readers are invited to submit letters for publication in this department. Submit to Irving R. Tabershaw, M.D., Editor, P.O. Box 2169, Rockville, MD 20852. Letters should be typewritten, double spaced and should be designated “For Publication.”

As you probably know, the Industrial Health Foundation (IHF) sponsored a Symposium on silica on March 12-13, 1975. The attached letter and questionnaire, according to Dr. Daniel C. Braun, constitute an “important outcome” of that meeting.

Since the questionnaire is biased and contains some erroneous information and since work in which I have been involved is cited, I believe a public response is indicated. I think readers of the JOEM will be interested and I hope you publish my letter with IHF’s letter and questionnaire.

Nobody from the Harvard School of Public Health involved in the epidemiologic study of Vermont granite workers was invited to this meeting. I am strongly in favor of critical analysis of all scientific studies (including ours) but since several fundamental errors were present in IHF’s analysis, our presence might have clarified these mistakes.

When the “questionnaire” is examined it can be seen that it is designed to produce a predetermined response. I will comment on the points in their “questionnaire” using their numbering system.

1. The usual industrial complaint is raised about inadequacy of current technology. One-half the granite sheds in Vermont are below the proposed 50 μg/m³ level of quartz. The technology to achieve this dust level consists of exhaust hoods, ducts and exhaust fans. When they are used properly and maintained the TLV is not exceeded.

2. The first sentence is true and is based on our work. Because of this we did not rely on the conversion of any particle count sampling to gravimetric sampling. All of the dose data for our dose-response curves were derived from mass-respirable sampling (the current method of choice).

3. Any study at any time could undergo “further evaluation.” One has to stop somewhere. One certified UICC (by NIOSH) reader did read the x-rays according to the UICC-Cincinnati classification. They were read blind. What constitutes an “adequate control”? Their claim that “exposure data is (sic) unreliable” is a meaningless statement without substantiation.

The important point is that the health effects seen on the x-ray occurred 13.5 years after the effects on pulmonary function. It took three years to do the study. It is not perfect, but it is the best we have. Further delays to reduce exposures, waiting for IHF’s reevaluation are not tolerable for the workers involved.

4. Who can disagree with the first sentence? The second sentence is a thinly veiled threat. OSHA’s action with the vinyl chloride standard suggests that the Federal Government is at last demonstrating commitment to protecting workers. Let’s protect the lungs of workers exposed to silica as well.

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Dr. Peter’s Letter to the Editor apparently is in response to a presumed consensus among the attendees of an Industrial Health Foundation Symposium on the Criteria for a Recommended Standard on Silica issued by NIOSH. The delay in publication is due to my unsuccessful attempt to obtain the letter to Assistant Secretary of Labor, Stender, referred to by Dr. Braun in his memorandum.

Irving R. Tabershaw, M.D.
Editor