

Asbestos Pollution

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Letter to Editor

A news article, entitled “Study Finds Asbestos in Nearly Half of Thailand’s Population” by Tim Povtak, was published in CTN News (Chaing Rai News) on July 3, 2019. Unfortunately, it contained some misunderstandings concerning the recent report of Incharoen and her colleagues [1]. For the record, two studies have been conducted in Thailand to search for the presence of asbestos bodies in the lungs of patients who had died of different conditions besides asbestos-related diseases. The first study by Sri umpai et al. [2] was published in 1985. Those researchers reported that, of the 330 cadavers that they had examined, 33 percent were found to contain asbestos bodies [2]. The second study by Incharoen et al. [1] was conducted 30 odd years later; those researchers found an even higher incidence of asbestos bodies, i.e. up to 48.5 percent, in 97 of the 200 cadavers that they had examined [1].

The findings of both studies implied that Thai people at large were being exposed to increasing amounts of asbestos fibers floating in the ambient atmosphere. The pollutants were likely being released from the earth during rough weather, as well as the scaling off of asbestos fibers from the roof tiles and siding of aging houses. The studies did not claim that such exposure would lead to the death of those who had been exposed to asbestos bodies in their lungs.

The questions regarding asbestos exposure in Thailand during the periods of the first study over 30year ago and during the period of the second study, namely why were only few cases of asbestos-related diseases, especially pleural mesothelioma, being reported in the country, in contrast to the general belief that exposure to even a small amounts of asbestos would readily cause asbestos-related diseases. The phenomenon may be explained by the fact that Asians are less likely to develop asbestos-related diseases perhaps because they lack susceptibility genes needed for the development of asbestos-related conditions [3]. Of note, it should be mentioned that I originally proposed conducting the two studies on asbestos bodies in autopsy lungs in order to observe possible changes in the ambient air pollution content in Thailand after an extended period of more than 30years.

References

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