



Letter to the editor

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Re: "A mortality study of workers employed in a German rock wool factory" by J Claude, R Frentzel-Beyme. Scand J Work Environ Health 10 (1984) 151-157.

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Re: "A mortality study of workers employed in a German rock wool factory" by J Claude, R Frenzel-Beyme. *Scand J Work Environ Health* 10 (1984) 151—157.

With reference to the recent paper published in your journal on the mortality of workers employed in a German rock wool factory by Dr's Claude and Frenzel-Beyme, I wonder whether some comments could be brought to the attention of your readers. While the authors' general conclusions are not being disputed, doubts may exist in respect to the data upon which the detailed internal analysis was based.

The first arises from the limitations concerning the impossibility of singling out, within the group of production workers, those employed in preproduction, those in the fiberizing process, and those in the secondary processes.

The second area of doubt stems from the possibility of heterogeneous exposures. Subsequent to its inclusion in the European Study of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), it was found that this factory had used asbestos, and both the reference group (internal, and also containing a mesothelioma) and the production and maintenance cohort under study were exposed. The degree of exposure cannot now be quantified, but it would be reasonable to assume that it was not uniform be-

tween the groups. Furthermore in the immediate proximity of the fiber production line was a cork production facility using coal-tar pitch. Diatomite, urea-formaldehyde foam, and polystyrene were also made in the same factory.

From the management we know that workers would have been deployed to different parts of the plant according to work requirements, there being no record of what time they spent in the various places of work.

Although the author's aims can be applauded, these reasons combine to suggest that their detailed analysis of internal groups should be received with caution.

As sponsor of the IARC European Study, the Joint European Medical Research Board, being in possession of the information just presented, would prefer to avoid possible misinterpretations and hence wishes to draw attention to these further details.

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