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# FDA Plans to Impose Limits on Asbestos In Certain Cosmetics

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## Maximum Impurity May Be 1%; Big Impact Seen on Dusting, Baby Powders, Shave Items

By JONATHAN SPIVAK
*Staff Reporter of* THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration plans to impose stringent limits on the amount of asbestos impurities in talcum powder and other cosmetics.

The FDA action results from recent evidence that some cosmetics contain significant amounts of asbestos. Although government experts insist there isn't any current evidence of risk from the levels of asbestos found in cosmetics, industrial exposure to asbestos inhalation is known to cause lung and other cancers.

The FDA requirements, to be issued this spring, are expected to establish a limit of 1% on asbestos impurities, or the lowest level that current techniques can detect. The major impact would be on manufacturers of dusting powders, baby powders, aftershave products and other talc-containing cosmetics. Trade sources estimate the retail market is $120 million to $160 million a year.

FDA-financed tests of 200 talcum products currently on the market disclose that 10% contain 2% to 4% asbestos impurities, with a handful running as high as 10% to 20%. Another 10% may contain levels of 1% to 2%, but the results aren't conclusive.

The FDA requirements aren't likely to stir much resistance from the companies. Most cosmetic concerns agree that asbestos must be eliminated from their products and some already have moved to do so, partly under FDA pressure. "We've already accomplished a lot of good," argues Robert Schaffner, director of the FDA's Office of Product Technology.

### Purer Sources of Supply

However, the new requirements could cause problems for some cosmetic manufacturers, particularly the smaller ones. Some concerns would have to increase quality controls and testing of finished products, FDA experts say. Others could be required to change to purer sources of supply.

The contamination problem arises because asbestos is naturally found in association with raw talc, but the medical significance remains to be determined. It isn't known whether the particular type of asbestos particles found in cosmetics are as hazardous as those from industrial exposure or whether a safe "no-effect" level exists. Some experts insist that any exposure could be hazardous and should be avoided.

Among the major producers of talc are: United Sierra, a division of Cyprus Mines Corp., Los Angeles; Pfizer Inc.; R. T. Vanderbilt Co. of New York; International Talc Inc., Gouverneur, N.Y., and Desert Minerals, a subsidiary of Johns-Manville Corp. Johnson & Johnson, a major manufacturer of talcum products, also mines its own talc in Vermont.

The tests for asbestos contamination of cosmetics have been conducted for the FDA by Seymour Z. Lewin, professor of chemistry at New York University. He used X-ray defraction, a laboratory procedure in which X-rays are bounced off the talc and are characteristically deflected by asbestos particles. FDA experts say the test picks up a level of 1% asbestos, but Professor Lewin argues it is accurate to 0.4%.

### Critical of Test

But some industry and academic experts are critical of the test. "There are many technical complaints from industry concerning the procedures used," declares Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, director of environmental sciences at Mt. Sinai Hospital and Medical School. Critics argue it may fail to distinguish between different forms of asbestos and other harmless minerals such as chlorite, which is an inert substance.

For example, Professor Lewin reported that Johnson & Johnson talcum powder contained 2% to 3% asbestos, but the company says it has demonstrated unequivocally that its products are completely free of asbestos. "Extensive studies by Johnson & Johnson and recognized independent laboratories have confirmed that the talc used in the company's products is free of any asbestos," the concern declares. Thus, precise test procedures will hold the key to FDA regulatory action.

The agency probably will require use of X-ray defraction to determine if there is an apparent asbestos problem. Confirming tests with optical microscope observations will be needed. Federal experts say they are satisfied with the accuracy of the tests.

The action on cosmetics is only a part of a broader FDA concern with the problems of asbestos in foods and drugs. Canadian studies have shown that asbestos fibers may be present in water, soft drinks and beer, in part, because asbestos is used as a filter. There also is evidence of their presence in some drugs.

The World Health Organization examined the evidence last fall and decided there wasn't any health hazard. But the FDA is determined to examine the issue in greater depth. It hopes to sponsor long-term feeding studies with animals to determine whether there is an increase in gastrointestinal cancer, the chief concern from asbestos ingestion. The studies, conducted in cooperation with the National Cancer Institute, will take four years to complete. But meantime, Dr. Albert Kolbye, acting director of the FDA's Office of Science, insists, there is "absolutely no reason to panic the public."