

worked for only 4 years on highrise apartments. Ladders, working several floors above him had sprayed asbestos on steel beams. The ladders were protected by masks, but he never suspected the danger of the gray dust which continually floated from above and settled on his bricks [14].

Our patient highlights the great importance of detailed occupational history taking. He described himself as a woolen mill worker for 26 years. He recalled working in the filter factory only following repeated and detailed questioning, subsequent to a review of his chest roentgenograms and the finding of asbestos bodies in the sputum. Asbestos was not mentioned until he gave a detailed description of his work and of the materials which he handled: For 9 months he transferred raw asbestos by hand from bags to carding machines. The atmosphere was very dusty and he always wore a nose mask. This mask became clogged frequently and was cleaned by blowing the dust into the air outside the workroom. After 9 months, the filter manufacturing process was transferred to a tobacco company and he returned to the woolen mill. His chest roentgenogram was first reported abnormal 13 years later when he began to have mild dyspnea on exertion; and 15 years later there was advanced pleural and pulmonary fibrosis with marked physiologic disturbances. We know of other men who had worked in the same plant on the same project who have died of asbestosis.

The diagnosis of asbestosis depends upon the occupational history and on classic signs and symptoms. These include dyspnea, finger clubbing, fine dry râles with a close-to-the-ear sound, radiographs showing linear densities more marked in the lower lung fields, with ill-defined cardiac and diaphragmatic outline, often associated with pleural thickening, plaques, and pleural calcifications [15] and physiologic abnormalities of restriction and impaired respiratory gas exchange. A simple industrial history often does not reveal the problem. A careful description of the type of work, the tools and the materials used may uncover a totally unsuspected and unpredictable exposure.

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