

Doctors Abandon Talc — Quietly

Until recently doctors used talcum powder to preserve rubber gloves they wear during surgery and pelvic examinations. For the same reason some women dust their birth control diaphragms with talcum. Most doctors stopped using talc because they found they were developing granulomas, a type of skin lesion on their fingers. However, the use of talc on diaphragms continues, in spite of the talc particles found inside cancerous tumors of the ovary and cervix.

Dr. Pierre Biscaye, (Mineralogist at the Lamont-Doherty Geological Observatory of Columbia University) decided to find out what the label wasn't telling: He analyzed one of the feminine-hygiene deodorants by x-ray diffraction, and found it was composed almost entirely of talc. The x-ray diffractogram also revealed minor amounts of some other substance which he was not able to identify. Dr. Biscaye stated that, "In this type of analysis, minerals such as asbestos could be present up to several per cent and not be detected."

Dr. Langer believes that the real villain in this controversy may prove to be asbestos in talcum powder and not the talc itself. His staff has prepared a report on the confirmation study it did on one of the ovarian cancer slides used by Dr. Griffiths as the basis for

It may be pure talc and harmless. If contaminated with asbestos, however, it is a menace to skin and to lungs, if any is inhaled.

