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BACKGROUND BRIEFING PAPER
for
PRESS and CONSUMER RESPONSE

The amount of asbestos fibers in talcum powder products, and the inhalation health hazards associated with their presence, are subjects of current interest but differing reports.

At a symposium held on August 3 the Food and Drug Administration of 40 scientists, physicians and consumers, it was generally agreed that most talcum powders of major manufacturers are relatively free of asbestos.

Nevertheless, on behalf of consumers, FDA is working on the details of a laboratory procedure for the analyses of asbestos in talcum powders which will give consistent meaningful results.

Accurate analyses for the amount of asbestos in talcum powder will be obtainable, according to many of the participants, only through the use of a battery of specialized instruments and techniques, including X-ray diffraction, polarizing optical microscopy, electron microscopy, and electron diffraction of selected particles.

In addition to extensive discussions of the analytical methods for asbestos used by various laboratories, the group also considered such topics as the medical significance of asbestos and other fibers, and the mineralogy of asbestos and talc ore deposits.

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