

Maguire asked Eiermann to produce his files on baby powders and to explain what the FDA has been doing about the reports of contamination.

At one point, Maguire asked whether the FDA considers any level of asbestos in powders, no matter how low, to be safe. Eiermann replied that no safe exposure to asbestos had been found, and later said that talc which is found to contain asbestos should not be used to make baby or body powder.

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He said, however, that sophisticated and time-consuming techniques that are needed to find asbestos fibers can test only minute amounts of talc. Because talc and asbestos often are mixed together in infinitely variable concentrations, tests on such small samples do not accurately reflect asbestos levels in larger samples of talc, he told Maguire.

The FDA, Eiermann said, wants a new law tightening government control on all cosmetics. The agency, he said, supports a bill sponsored by Senator Thomas Eagleton, D-Mo., which would require cosmetic manufacturers to safely test their products and to submit the test results to the FDA for approval before the products could be sold.

A FDA study conducted last year indicates that cosmetics may be responsible for as many as 140,000 injuries to American consumers each year, ranging from minor skin irritations to prolonged medical problems requiring professional attention. Testimony before the Senate has placed the number of cosmetic related injuries anywhere from 29,000 to 60,000 per year.

Eiermann said the FDA now is studying, among other things, hair dyes, antiperspirants, and mascara for evidence of danger. For example, he said, there is some evidence that mascara can become contaminated from contact with the skin and may cause ulcers on the cornea, the transparent cover over the lens of the eye. If the brush used to apply mascara accidentally scratches the cornea, he said, it can deposit germs which can cause corneal ulcers, which can lead to blindness. The FDA, said Eiermann, is studying the use of preservatives in mascara to prevent the spread of such germs, and may issue regulations on the composition of mascara.

There is no evidence, on the other hand, that baby powder is a potential health hazard, Eiermann said. Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick, the nation's leading manufacturer of baby powders, has tested its talc on hamsters and has found no evidence that talc inhaled into the lungs is hazardous, he said.