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Today's talcum powder has no threat of asbestos, FDA says

EASTON, Pa. (AP) The recent worries that the talc used to strengthen crayons, such as the Crayolas made in Easton, may contain asbestos is making some people wonder if talcum powder could be dangerous to babies.

The Food and Drug Administration says there's no need to worry about today's talcum powder though the powder made decades ago is questionable.

``Some cosmetic talc produced in the 1960s and early 1970s did contain asbestiform minerals," according to a letter provided by the FDA.

The FDA was worried about asbestos in cosmetic talc, the letter says, but, ``at that time, the analytical procedures for determining asbestos in talc were not fully developed."

So the FDA asked the industry to improve testing methods. Talc suppliers began to analyze their talc for asbestos and improved the purity of the product, the letter says. By the late 1970s, ``even when asbestos was present, the levels were so low that no health hazard existed," the FDA stated.

The question has become timely because the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported recently that two government-certified labs found asbestos in crayons by three manufacturers including industry leader Binney & Smith, which makes 12 million Crayolas a day at its Lehigh Valley plants.

A Cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance Association official said she could not speculate whether asbestos ever contaminated cosmetic talc. But she said cosmetic talc cannot contain asbestos now.

``There is no safe level of asbestos in cosmetic grade talc," Irene Malbin, vice president of public affairs at CFTA, told The Express-Times of Easton. ``There is no asbestos in cosmetic grade talc."

Johnson's Baby Powder never contained any asbestos, **Johnson & Johnson** spokesman John McKeegan said.

``We do everything we can to ensure its purity," McKeegan said. ``It exceeds all government standards for purity. People have trusted it for many generations."

There are different talcs for different purposes, McKeegan said, including industrial, cosmetic, pharmaceutical and food grades. He said baby powder is a cosmetic grade.

``Johnson's Baby Powder is mined at a talc mine in Vermont that we went through very carefully before selecting," McKeegan said. ``The mine itself goes through many tests to make sure there are no asbestos fibers, or minerals that could become asbestos fibers, in the talc."

The mine uses X-ray defraction, polarized light microscopy, scanning electron microscopy and transmission electron microscopy, McKeegan said. The mine runs its own tests and also uses independent labs, he said.

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## No. 2 crayon maker says it had quit using talc; tests find no asbestos

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SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

America's second-largest crayon maker, Rose Art, says its crayons no longer are made with talc, and new tests conducted for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer show no signs of cancer-causing asbestos.

Rose Art was one of three crayon brands in which laboratories hired by the P-I found tremolite and anthophyllite asbestos in repeated tests conducted earlier this year. The other two brands were Crayola and Prang. Asbestos was found in 32 of 40 crayons tested.

"I don't know whether there is asbestos or not in the talc, but I do know that we no longer used talc in our crayons," Lawrence Rosen, Rose Art's president, said yesterday. "We haven't used talc in our crayons for at least 15 months, and I'm surprised to find any of the old stuff still around."

Rosen said the Rose Art crayons tested this spring for the P-I "obviously were old stock and manufactured years ago."

Rose Art crayons bought yesterday were tested by Lab/Cor Inc., one of two Seattle labs that did the initial testing.

"There was no asbestos or talc found in the Rose Art crayons we tested today," Lab/Cor president and chief scientist Robert Fisher said yesterday.

Crayola, Prang and Rose Art insist that there is no asbestos in their crayons. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has taken responsibility for the dispute and is having crayons analyzed by outside labs. The commission's preliminary findings are expected to be released late next week, said Russ Rader, the agency's director of public affairs.

Labs throughout the country have tested crayons for government agencies, school districts and news organizations. Most of the analysts believe that the asbestos is a contaminant in the talc that manufacturers add to strengthen the crayons.

The talc used by most American crayon makers comes from a mine in upstate New York owned by R.T. Vanderbilt Co.

Vanderbilt says there is no asbestos its talc, but the Connecticut-based company has been at the center of a contentious, 30-year-old fight with government regulators and public health experts over whether the cancer-causing fibers are in its talc.

The product safety commission says it must not only determine whether there is asbestos in the crayons, but if there is, whether it presents a health hazard to children. The amount of

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asbestos detected in the P-I's testing, and later tests at many other labs, showed relatively low levels of the carcinogenic fibers. But more than 20 physicians and public health experts have said that no asbestos, at any level, should be in any product used by children.

"I would like to say that I foresaw this talc controversy and stopped it because of that," said Rose Art's Rosen, "but in reality, we stopped using the talc because it made a better, smoother drawing crayon.

"We haven't used any Vanderbilt talc, or any talc for that matter, for more than 15 months," Rosen said. "We still have unopened bags of it in the warehouse that we have no intention of ever using again."

The P-I's report of asbestos in his and other crayons "came as a shock," he said.

"There had never been any clue that the talc had asbestos in it," he said, adding that "99.9 percent of our crayons that are on store shelves today is the new non-talc products. We sell them to four huge chains (including Wal-Mart, Target and Toys 'R' Us) and we know exactly where they are."

"Nobody wants to see a recall, and we're all waiting to see what the CPSC finds," Rosen said.

When asked how consumers could differentiate between the old crayons with talc and the new talc-free model, Rosen said, "I'll get back to you."

Rosen's New Jersey-based company, which is family-owned, employs 2,000 people and produces more than 500 million crayons a year in the United States and Taiwan.

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