

### Asbestos in J&J Baby Powder?

*P. H. Selkoff JUN 20 72  
I imagine you know  
about 25 signs that far  
W. Langer  
R. H. Langer*

# Doctor Admits He May Have Been Mistaken

NEW BRUNSWICK — Johnson & Johnson officials yesterday denied a story which appeared in The New York Times, alleging that Johnson & Johnson's baby powder might contain asbestos fibers.

The doctor who performed the tests on which the charges were based said the story had been blown entirely out of proportion.

Dr. Arthur Langer of the Mt. Sinai Hospital Environmental Laboratory in New York City told The Home News that he had conducted the tests about 18 months

ago at the request of the city Environmental Protection Administration.

Langer tested one container of Langers baby powder and one of Johnson & Johnson's. "Foolishly I sent them a written report after looking at only two samples," he said.

"The data were very preliminary in nature, and what is more, I may have mistaken long talcum fibers for asbestos fibers. They have similar properties," the doctor said.

He continued, "It annoys the hell out of me—there are a lot more important things than looking for asbestos in talcum powder. For example they should be worrying about asbestos in spray paint and paper mache."

The Mt Sinai lab has been actively involved in warning the public of the dangers of inhaling asbestos fibers. The primary danger is a long-term risk of contracting a rare kind of lung cancer.

Dr. Irving Selkoff, who heads the laboratory, has been a central figure in the controversy over asbestos fibers floating in the air at the Johns-Manville plant in Manville. Selkoff has diagnosed lung cancers in a number of former workers at that plant.

But Langer said the amount of asbestos he saw in the baby powder was "only a bare trace level." At the current state of medical knowledge, he said, there is no way of knowing if such a small quantity could be harmful.

Johnson & Johnson denied that it has any asbestos at all in its baby powder. A company spokesman, Lawrence Foster, said he has reports from three independent laboratories proving this.

The three labs are McCrone Associates in Chicago,

Fred Pool in Great Britain and the University of Colorado School of Mines.

"Whether there was a slight trace of something that Dr. Langer might have interpreted as asbestos is a minor point," Foster said.

"The important point is that he said the Times story was erroneous and out of perspective."

Langer agreed that there is "some controversy over what the levels are. It takes an electron microscope to see these fibers," he added.

"It's no secret to anyone that the type of rock that talcum is in usually contains asbestos," the doctor said.

"Some talcum contains lots of asbestos, some very little. The Johnson & Johnson sample happens to be very pure talc."

