CORRESPONDENCE

Toxicity of mercury compounds as a possible risk factor for cardiovascular diseases

Sir,—This letter was prompted by the paper of Barregard et al (1990;47:99–104). These authors investigated the mortality and incidence of cancer in men (n = 1190) exposed to inorganic mercury at eight Swedish chloralkali plants. The subjects had been monitored for at least one year between 1946 and 1984. One of the results of the study is an interesting observation that cardiovascular mortality was slightly but statistically significantly increased—for no known reason—as the authors put it. In discussion the authors conclude that "if exposure to mercury does indeed increase cardiovascular mortality hypertension could be a possible mechanism."1

In our own investigations we have been dealing with the effect of mercury compounds, especially methylmercuric chloride, on blood platelet function and blood clotting. We found that at low concentrations, mercury compounds (0.01–10 μM/l of blood) may act synergistically with physiological activators of platelets and may also cause changes in blood coagulation in experimental animals.1,5 The number of papers appearing recently concerning cardiovascular toxicity2-8 and changes in haemostasis9 caused by mercurials is now so great that the problem requires an overall study. In the World Health Organisation reports9-12 no mention has been made of the effect of mercury and its compounds on the coagulation fibrinolytic system and platelet function. We hope that this new aspect of the toxic effect of mercury will be taken into consideration when planning studies on people exposed to mercury.

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NOTICES

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Continuing education programme

Hazardous waste annual refresher, 9 January 1992

Latest information on protective clothing and respirators, air monitoring techniques, safe use of specialised equipment, and legal and regulatory issues related to worker protection at hazardous waste sites. Meets federal and state requirements for eight additional hours of refresher training. For those responsible for worker safety and health at hazardous waste sites who have taken the basic 40 hour course. Priority given to government employees.

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Fall protection, 22 January 1992

How to legally protect workers in roofing, leading edge work, steel erection and other high work station trades. Fall protection practices mandated by new WISHA regulations. Demonstrations and sample equipment available. For safety and health professionals, construction managers, prime contractors, subcontractors, worker representatives, attorneys.

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Occupational Health nursing update, 13 February 1992

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Supervising hazardous waste operations, 12 March 1992

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NIOSH-approved course designed to teach techniques of performing spirometry, calculating pulmonary function values, and interpreting results. For nurses, occupational health physicians, physician assistants, industrial hygienists.

Fee: $325

5 Further publications available from the author.
9 Klöcking HP. The effects of a dose of mercuric chloride, below the acute toxic dose, on haemostasis in rats. Archives of Toxicology 1984;7(supp1):389–90.
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