CORRESPONDENCE

Cigarette smoking and small irregular opacities

Sir,—The article by Weiss (1991;48:841–4) contains some misinformation and the findings could be interpreted differently from the conclusions reached by the author.

The International Labour Office (ILO) guidelines are clear that 0/1 films are to be considered category 0—that is, normal—and films graded 1/0 are ultimately considered to be category 1 and therefore abnormal. The ILO guidelines do not delineate “suspect” pneumoconiosis, but rather boundary films with clear delineation into a normal and abnormal category.

Ultimately, considering the 23 cases of 0/1 films as normal, one is left with five cases in category 1, and considering that if asbestos had been used at this facility, even bystanders with no known asbestos exposure could well have been exposed, accounting for the changes seen here.

To consider a 0/1 category as containing small irregular opacities flies in the face of convention. Also, standard reference texts on the reading of radiographs, such as Fraser and Paré, do not support the view held by this author that cigarette smoking will produce small irregular opacities.

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Author's reply:

Frank's primary contention seems to be based on the naive assumption that

the ILO scale clearly distinguishes normal films from abnormal ones. If this were true, there would be no need for a 12-point scale. The 4-point scale, however, is a rather gross semiquantitative scheme. Instead of recognising an arbitrary stratification of this sort, nature gives us a continuum from normal to abnormal and this continuum is better served with the 12-point scale. Unfortunately this scale is complicated by the variation in perception between observers and even within the same observer and I considered this at some length in my discussion. Consequently it is simplistic to argue that the ILO guidelines create a “clear delineation into a normal and abnormal category.” To do so would lead to a loss of information.

The 1980 guidelines for the use of ILO international classification of radiographs of pneumoconioses (my reference 4) state on page 3 that “if the appearances might be due to pneumoconiosis, record the observations according to the classification. . . .” On page 4 the guidelines say “By using the 12-point scale of profusion, the classification recognises the existence of a continuity of change from no small opacities to the most advanced category.” On page 14 (note 8) the guidelines state (as paraphrased in my discussion) that “for instance, categories 0/1 and 1/0 may be used to represent ‘suspect’ pneumoconiosis.” Quod erat demonstrandum.

Frank used the term “boundary films.” As yet there are no such films in general use. They were recommended for future research in the guidelines on page 31 with the statement that they “would be particularly useful in helping to distinguish between categories 0/1 and 1/0.” Such research would be highly desirable, especially if accompanied by radiographic—pathological correlation.

NOTICE

The eleventh international lead conference—Pb93—will take place at Le Zitelle Congress Centre in Venice from 24 to 27 May 1993

Organised by the European lead development committee, comprising lead associations and information centres in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, Pb93 will continue the successful series of lead conferences that began in London in 1962.

As on previous occasions, the conference will bring together lead producers and consumers from around the world as well as many others interested in the future of the metal to discuss technological developments, research, and market trends for lead. The impact of economic climate and of the revolutionary changes in eastern Europe will be a particular focus of attention. The increasingly important issues of environmental control and risk management will also be closely examined. There will be simultaneous interpretation into Italian and English throughout the sessions. A trade exhibition of lead products and services will be held in an area adjacent to the conference room in Le Zitelle Congress Centre throughout the conference and there will be a sightseeing programme taking in some of the main attractions of the Venice area for accompanying persons.

A programme and registration form will be issued shortly. Further details are available from: the conference secretariat; Lead Development Association, 42 Weymouth Street, London W1N 3LQ. Telephone 071 499 8422; fax 071 493 1555; telex 261286 (contact David Wilson or Caroline Baggott).