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From The Desk of:
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Major Young,

For Your Information

Expert: Tower health threat unlikely

By GAIL ROBERTS

A medical researcher from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health said yesterday those who were exposed to toxic chemicals inside the State Office Building will probably not suffer serious health problems as a result of that exposure.

"Our guess is that at this point in time they won't suffer any significant long-term or short-term effects, but we are looking into it to make sure," said Dr. James Melius, NIOSH's chief of Hazard Evaluation and Technical Assistance Branch. The period of exposure was too brief to cause serious harm, he said.

Melius is currently involved in about nine

other studies involving worker exposure to polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). He attended a briefing yesterday for local doctors on the physical examinations they will be giving people who were exposed to the chemicals.

The doctors are all from United Health Services Inc., whose contract with the state has not yet been signed.

State health officials and a medical consultant working with Versar Inc., the state's consultant on the cleanup, were also at the briefing at C.S. Wilson Memorial Hospital.

The physicals and blood tests are set to begin Monday and probably will take six to eight weeks to complete. About 120 cleanup

workers, maintenance personnel and firefighters will be getting both the physicals and blood tests. Most of those 120 people were exposed to the PCBs, dioxins and furans inside the 18-story office building for more than 25 hours.

A six-page questionnaire, which must be completed by the examining physicians, contains checklists for such symptoms as chloraene — a rash-like condition, nausea and enlarged livers. One of the major difficulties the physicians will face is separating symptoms resulting from other health problems from those authentically related to the contamination of the office building.

Melius said the blood test results would determine the need for fat biopsies — tests

which are more conclusive, but also cost at least four times as much as the blood tests.

About 200 to 500 times more PCBs gather in fat tissue compared to the blood, Melius said. Two weeks ago, a Swedish expert on PCB contamination said here that blood tests would be inconclusive at this point because the chemicals leave the bloodstream with time. The state tower fire occurred Feb. 5.

The procedure for releasing the results of the tests was uncertain as of yesterday, although it appears those tested will receive results in the mail with a cover letter interpreting the data. It was also suggested that the results be mailed to the physicians of those tested.

Local

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