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CIGARETTES = LUNG CANCER ?

BY PAT McGRADY

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CIGARETTES = LUNG CANCER?

BY PAT McGRADY

Mr. McGrady, former newspaperman, is Science Editor for the American Cancer Society. The views he expresses in this pamphlet, however, do not necessarily reflect the policies of the society. . . . The art work was prepared by Bunji Tagawa.

CANCER of the respiratory tract will kill about 26,000 Americans this year. Tuberculosis kills about 25,000, diabetes about 25,000, suicides and homicides together about 25,000. Three years of Korean warfare cost 25,604 American lives. Motor vehicle accidents, about which we hear so much, will kill about 39,000, only one-half more than this single form of cancer.

The most striking thing about lung cancer, however, is the way it is increasing, particularly among men. Its incidence and mortality rate are both rising. The death rate has doubled with each passing decade. Instead of slowing down, the rate still seems to be increasing. Perhaps half of this increase is due to the fact that the population is aging (people over 35 are the targets) and a large part is due to an improvement in diagnosis of the disease. Also there have been several changes in the methods of recording lung cancer in death statistics. But over and above these factors there has been a marked increase in lung cancer death rates. Among American males, lung cancer death rates—as recorded—have risen from 0.7 per 100,000 population in 1914 to 3.6 in 1930 and 19.5 in 1950. The disease shows a notable favoritism for men. The incidence of all kinds of

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cancer has increased to the point where cancer now claims more than 230,000 American lives each year; and lung cancer is now believed to account for more than one-tenth of the cancer deaths. Unless means of checking cancer as a disease are found, one in four now alive will have cancer, and an increasing proportion of these will probably have cancer of the lung.

The increase in lung cancer has been noted in many areas of the modern world, although lung cancer death rates vary a good deal from country to country. Some primitive countries still appear to have virtually no lung cancer; and the reason ascribed to this is that infectious disease kills many of the people before they reach the "lung cancer age." Only 6 per cent of deaths from lung cancer occur in men under 45 and 8 per cent in women.

the problem of detection

FOR AT LEAST 95 out of every 100 patients the diagnosis of lung cancer is a death sentence. Only surgeons of great skill have an appreciable record—say 10 or 12 per cent—of salvage. Conventional radiation is palliative at best; and it is too early to tell whether multimillion-volt x-rays, which at first blush looked promising, will improve the present low rate of cure.

The reason for this sad record against a major disease lies largely in the present failure to detect it in time. This is a tragic irony, for lung cancer usually develops very slowly, before it finally becomes known through a persistent cough or some other slight symptom and, within a few months or years, kills the patient. In about one-half the patients, it starts in the cells lining the lung passages and spreads into the lung tissue and nearby lymph nodes. Sometimes it is only when it begins blocking the breathing tubes that the cough starts and the cancer's presence is given away. By that time, it may have seeded the liver, adrenal glands, or brain with its cancer cells.

Regular chest x-rays often show up lung cancers while they are still curable by surgical removal of the affected lung. But the shadows so closely resemble other minor conditions that they are not always suspected. More than one-half the cancers were missed in one study

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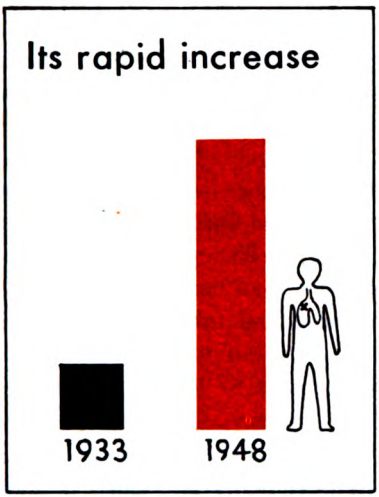
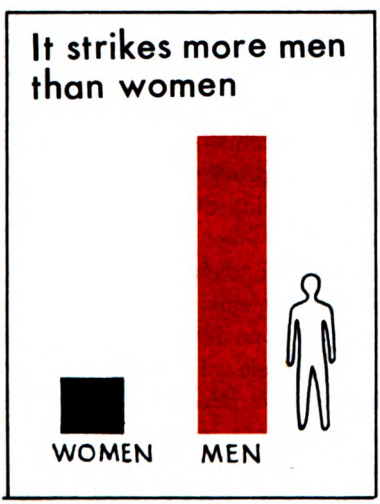
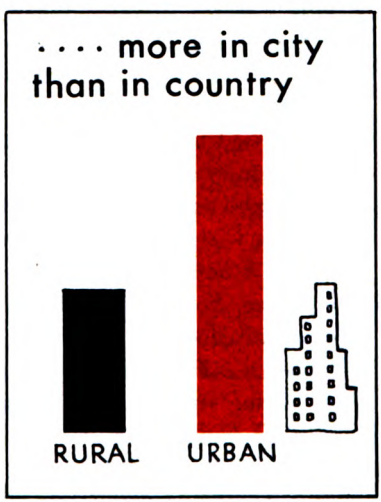
Some facts about lung cancer









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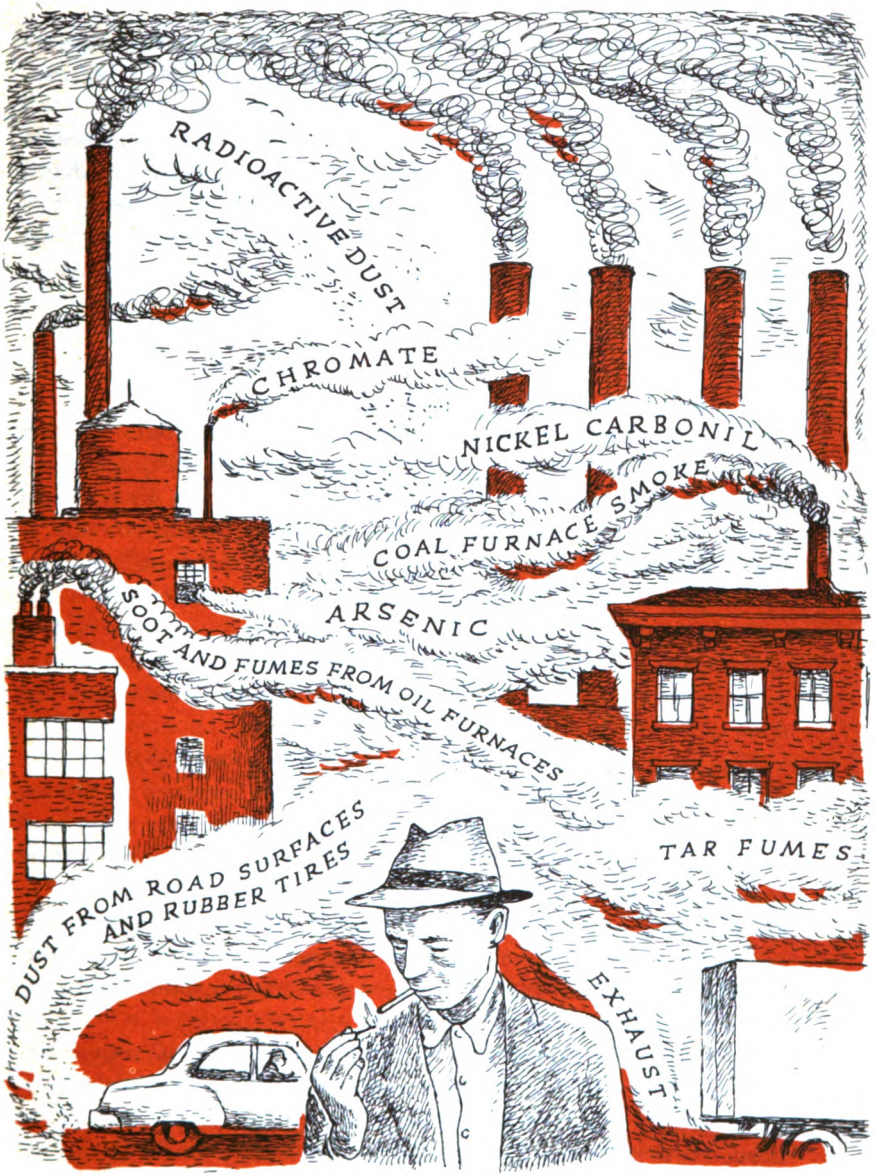

Possible cancer-causing substances in an industrial town

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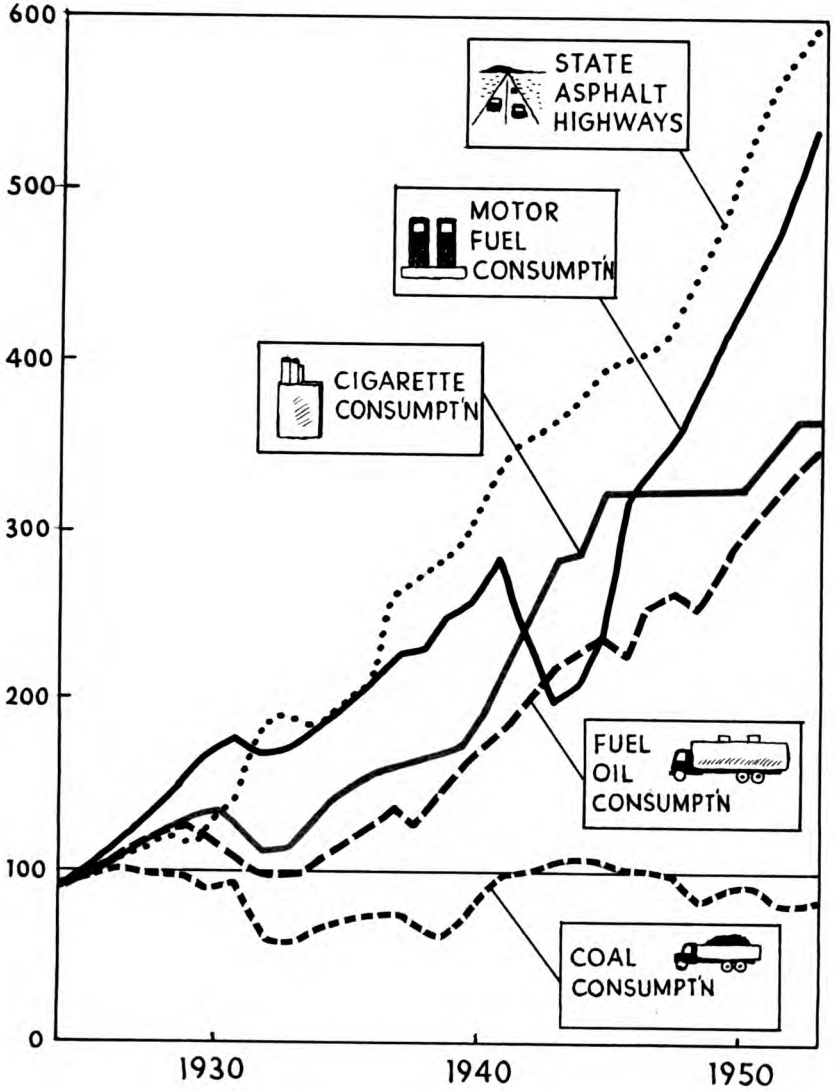
Possible causes of lung cancer



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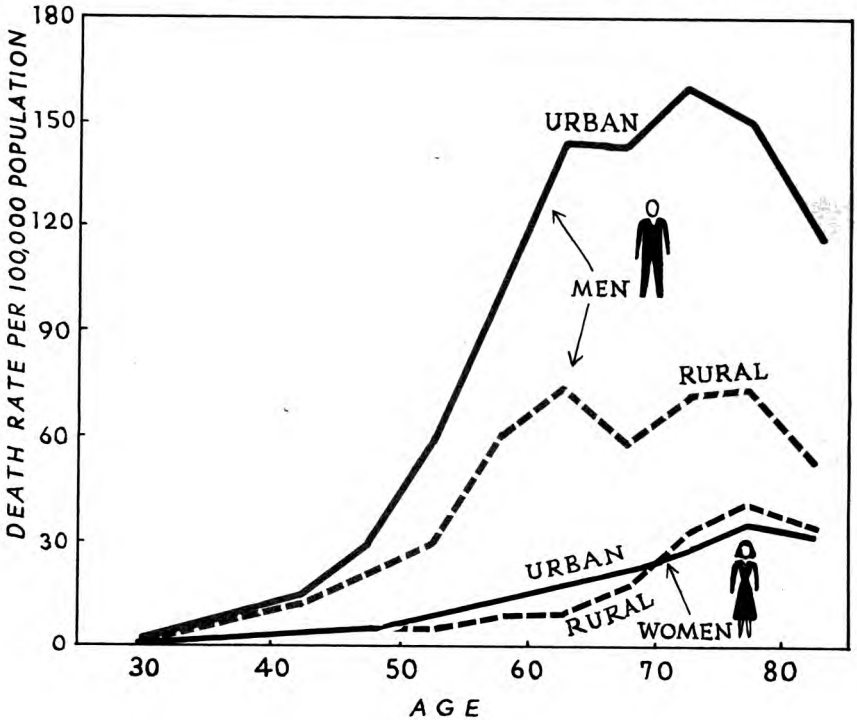
RESPIRATORY SYSTEM CANCER DEATH RATES IN URBAN & RURAL STATES



into rural areas. He said that an international committee had found roughly the same cigarette and lung cancer association in all countries studied.

Dr. Harold L. Stewart of the National Cancer Institute, an international authority on the geographical prevalence of cancer, has pointed out that there is a wide variation in the amount of lung cancer in different parts of the world. In most cases, however, no effort has been made, to compare these figures with the use of tobacco.

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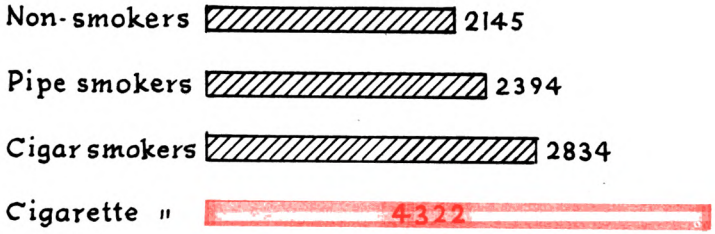
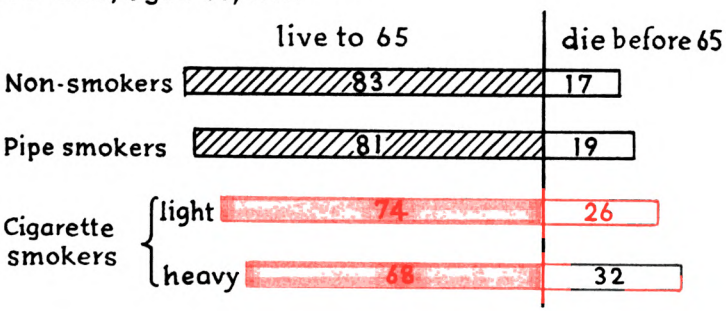
Smoking and vital statistics

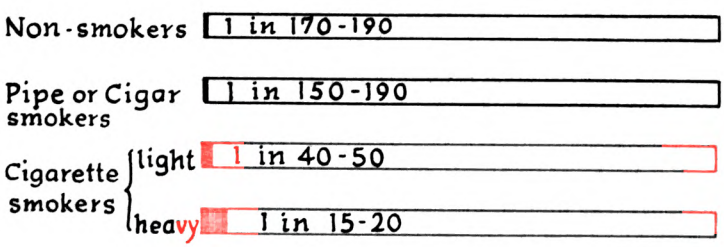
Death rates of men, 60-64, per 100,000



Of 100 men, aged 50, will . . . .



Young males' chances of getting lung cancer



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