

NEWS DIGEST

your quick guide to news from around the world

Dow hopes to pay less in implant lawsuit

1 NEW YORK — Emboldened by new studies that failed to prove a link between breast implants and disease, Dow Corning Corp. on Monday raised new obstacles to women seeking damages from the company.

Dow Corning, once the largest implant maker, made a new \$2 billion settlement offer, but said it would only pay \$600 million unless a court rules that the implants make people sick.

Dow Corning proposed paying \$2 billion two years ago as part of an unsuccessful attempt to settle all implant claims around the world.

The stringent terms of the new offer partly reflect an accumulation of evidence that breast implants may not cause the litany of ills claimed by thousands of women, the company said. Those claims helped push Dow Corning into bankruptcy reorganization in May 1995.

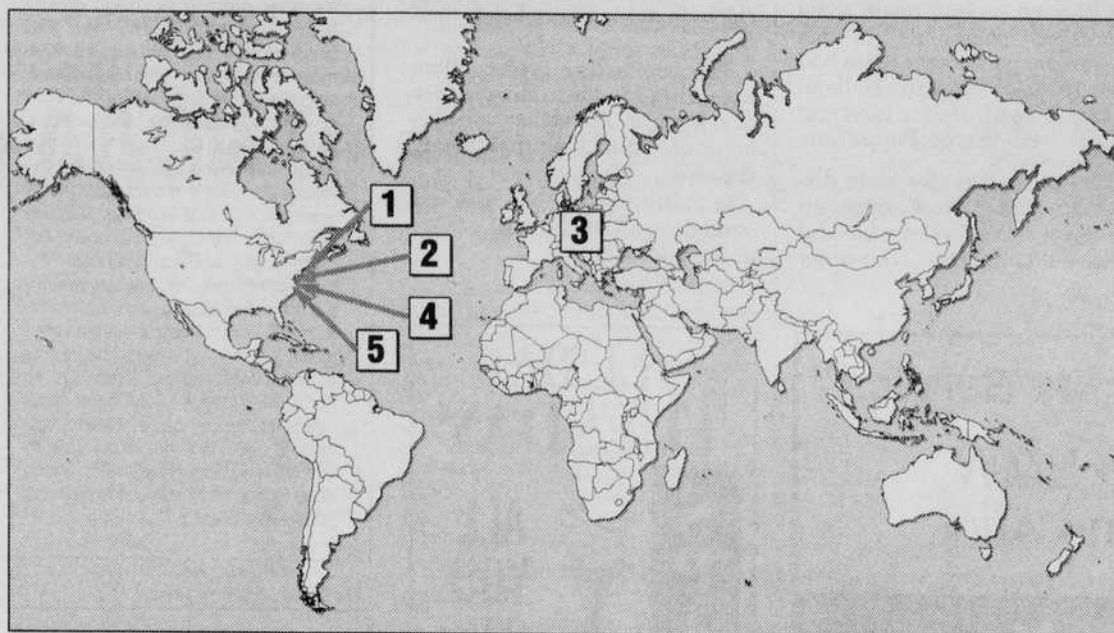
"The evidence disproving a link between implants and disease has been overwhelming," said Dow Corning spokesman Michael Jackson.

Dow Corning's new offer is contained in a reorganization plan aimed at getting the company out of bankruptcy court.

The offer would be worth \$6,666 to each of the roughly 300,000 women who received Dow Corning implants, although not every one is expected to file a claim.

"It's a joke," said Lynda Roth of Broomfield, Colo. who got sick after receiving a breast implant in 1990 following cancer surgery.

"Every time they try to make a deal, it becomes less and less favorable to the people they have victimized, which is not surprising for a company with very little morality and very few ethics when it comes to dealing with the problems they've created," said Roth, president of the Coalition of Silicone Survivors.



Balanced budget amendment may pass

2 WASHINGTON — After years of summits, stalemates and just plain neglect, 1997 promises the best opportunity yet for the White House and Congress to finally shake hands on a deal aimed at balancing the budget.

It won't be slam-dunk easy; formidable political and policy obstacles remain. But with the economy robust, presidential elections over and both sides saying publicly that they crave such an agreement, Republicans and Democrats start out with fewer, lower hurdles.

"The planets really are aligned this year," said Robert Reischauer, former director of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, who thinks a pact is likely.

Unlike two years ago, President Clinton and many congressional Democrats now voice acceptance of the GOP's premise that federal deficits must be eliminated — by 2002. Clinton does not face reelection and has less to gain by casting Republicans as coldhearted budget-slashers. Looking to his legacy, he has even said if he could achieve only one thing in his second term, it would be balancing the budget.

Czech president undergoes surgery

3 PRAGUE, Czech Republic — Doctors removed a malignant tumor and half of President Václav Havel's right lung Monday and gave the chain-smoking former dissident good chances for recovery.

Havel regained consciousness soon after the operation and was in intensive care, doctors said.

Chief surgeon Dr. Pavel Pafko told reporters a malignant tumor of about 15 millimeters, or one-half inch, was taken out during the 3 1/2-hour surgery.

Pafko said Havel, 60, probably would remain hospitalized for at least a week and should recover fully in about six weeks.

Havel stopped smoking in front of television cameras years ago but has kept up the habit in private despite a history of respiratory problems.

He made only limited concessions to his approaching operation, cutting his consumption to four cigarettes a day. Pafko said one of the last cigarettes Havel had was with Health Minister Jan Strasky.

Sheriffs take Brady bill to Supreme Court

4 WASHINGTON — Two county sheriffs from Montana and Arizona are challenging the Brady gun-control law before the Supreme Court, arguing the federal government cannot require local police to help enforce the measure.

Sheriffs' departments may not "be conscripted for a federal crusade," say lawyers for Jay Printz, sheriff of Ravalli County, Mont.

Also seeking to overturn the law is Sheriff Richard Mack of Graham County, Ariz.

But government lawyers say "there is no constitutional rule preventing Congress from devising a national solution and then requiring limited local assistance."

"I believe it's constitutional," President Clinton told reporters Monday. "Tens of thousands of people with criminal backgrounds and other serious problems couldn't get handguns because of the Brady law. ... People are alive today because of it."

The justices are expected to issue a ruling by next July.

AIDS drugs need to be tested for children

5 WASHINGTON — Rosemary Johnson finally felt healthy thanks to powerful new AIDS drugs. But she was still in torment — unable to give her sick daughter the same medicines because no one knew how they would affect children.

Since none of the three new and potent medicines revolutionizing AIDS care is yet approved for child use, pediatricians and parents have begun struggling on their own to determine safe doses — fearing that otherwise the children will die waiting as drug companies study the question.

Under a pediatrician's care, Johnson's 9-year-old now is one of just a handful of children nationwide taking one of the new drugs. So far, she is doing well. "I want other children to have this chance," Johnson said.

"In hindsight, perhaps we should have moved forward to get some experimental data" sooner, said Dr. Miklos Salgo of Hoffman LaRoche, maker of the first protease inhibitor, saquinavir.

"AIDS kills children just like it kills adults," said Dr. Nancy Hutton of Johns Hopkins University's Children's Center. She wants drug makers to test new AIDS medicines in children as soon they test adults, changing decades of scientific practice.

The new protease inhibitors are so effective for adults that pediatricians want to use them in children. They just don't know how.

Hutton furiously sought early data from drug makers to calculate her own doses of ritonavir, the only liquid protease sold, for six very ill children, including Johnson's 9-year-old daughter.

A few months later, all six children are doing well, although Hutton warns that she doesn't know how long the effect will last or what is the best dose.

—The Associated Press

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