to the demolition of pipes, structures or equipment previously sprayed with asbestos.

The emergency standard requires that the employer check the respiratory devices for proper fit and train employees in their correct use. Periodic inspections, proper cleaning, repairing and storing of the respiratory devices are responsibilities of the employer.

The standard also specifies that hand or power-operated tools that produce asbestos dust—saws, scorers, abrasive wheels, and drills—must be equipped with local exhaust ventilation and dust collectors. When asbestos is mixed with other products—such as cement, mortar, grout or plastic—the mixing must be done in closed containers. Cleaning up the debris by dry sweeping or blowing it away is prohibited. Any accumulation of asbestos dust must be removed rapidly by vacuum cleaners. Asbestos waste must be disposed of in sealed containers.

The OSHA Standards Advisory Committee for Asbestos has recommended an exposure limit of two fibers greater than 5 microns in length per cubic centimeter. This proposal, based on a NIOSH criteria document, would not be effective for two years, in order to allow the installation of the necessary engineering controls. The committee, representing government, labor and industry, also suggested that the future standard include a program of comprehensive medical surveillance requiring pre-employment medical examinations of applicants, periodic medical evaluations of workers, and medical records to be kept by employers for the use of OSHA and NIOSH.

The research and mortality studies of today have tarnished the reputation of this magic mineral, once the object of fabulous tales. One legend revolves around the tablecloth of Charlemagne, the eighth-century ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. When the cloth woven from asbestos fibers was thrown into the flames, it was withdrawn not only intact, but whiter and cleaner than before. Charlemagne used this piece of "witchcraft" to mystify his guests as well as to intimidate his enemies in order to win psychological battles.

The jump from ancient legend to contemporary knowledge about asbestos is a tremendous advance—except in one area. Our ability to combat the disasterous effects of asbestos on the human system is still negligible. The mystery surrounding asbestos continues today, but the price is not in lost battles but in lost working lives. □



Wrong: Asbestos dust collects with other debris on a construction site. The cleaning and sweeping process raises clouds of asbestos dust, endangering the employees and the community.



Right: The new OSHA standard requires that asbestos debris be removed in closed containers or plastic bags.