

**ASBESTOS SITUATION
IN THE
UNITED STATES TODAY**
(December 1999)

Asbestos is a valuable raw material in the United States today for production of vehicle braking systems, asphaltic roof coatings and gaskets. The U.S. consumes about 16,000 metric tonnes of chrysotile asbestos per year. And, asbestos cement pipe and sheets are imported for use. Asbestos is also still mined in the state of California. Asbestos is no longer used for friable insulation or similar products that caused high worker exposures many decades ago.

Although use of asbestos is stringently regulated in the United States to assure that workers and consumers are not significantly exposed to asbestos fibers, only one restriction exists on the types of products that can be manufactured with asbestos. Product manufacturers are free to market any asbestos-containing product that was being marketed in 1989; EPA approval must be obtained before marketing any new asbestos-containing product not being produced in 1989.

In the mid-1980's, public panic over asbestos in buildings — which was later discovered to have been unwarranted — prompted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to propose a ban on all asbestos-containing products. EPA's proposal resulted in a massive compilation of information on the benefits of asbestos in many products, as well as the potential risk for human exposure in such uses. Based on this comprehensive record, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit found such a ban unwarranted. Although the Court allowed EPA to require its prior approval before new products were developed, it found all existing uses must be allowed to continue.

The U.S. Court found a ban of asbestos-containing products unwarranted because:

- No significant human exposures to asbestos fibers would occur if the products were produced and used under controlled conditions;
- Substitutes for asbestos-containing products themselves posed potential human health risks that could be more significant than any potential risks from asbestos; and
- Asbestos-containing products offered significant benefits not offered by substitute products.

Production and use of asbestos-containing products, like production and use of many other chemicals that can pose risks if not adequately controlled, are regulated in the United States not only by EPA, but also by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Department of transportation (DOT). EPA regulates air and water emissions from asbestos production facilities and provides rules for disposal of asbestos-containing waste. OSHA has established a comprehensive health standard for asbestos that requires workers with potential exposures to be aware of and trained to minimize any asbestos risks and sets a stringent limit for airborne exposure. DOT regulates transport of asbestos.

As a result of comprehensive regulation in the United States today, exposures to workers or the public are minimal and do not pose significant risk. At the same time, the public derives benefits from the unique qualities of this mineral as an effective and low cost raw material for construction and friction products.

**THE STATUS OF ASBESTOS PRODUCTS IN THE U.S.
(DECEMBER 1999)**

PROHIBITED

Corrugated paper
Commercial paper
Flooring felt
Rollboard
Speciality paper
New uses of asbestos

AUTHORIZED

Corrugated asbestos cement sheet
Flat asbestos cement sheet
Vinyl asbestos floor tile
Asbestos cement pipes
Asbestos cement shingles
Friction materials
Brake linings
Clutch facing
Disc brake pads
Asbestos clothing
Automatic transmission component
Roofing felt
Roof coating
Non-roof coatings
Millboard
Pipeline wrap
Acetylene cylinder filler
Asbestos diaphragms
High-grad electrical paper
Packings
Sealant tape
Brake blocks
Missile liners
Arc shutes
Battery separators
Reinforced plastic
Textile products
Gaskets