

Executive Summary

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been concerned about the disease-causing potential of exposure to airborne asbestos in nonindustrial settings since the early 1970s. In the late 1970s, attention was focused on schools and other buildings where asbestos is present in a variety of construction materials. EPA initiated a Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to help school districts identify and correct potential asbestos hazards. As part of this program, in 1979 EPA prepared and distributed "Asbestos-Containing Materials in School Buildings: A Guidance Document," Parts 1 and 2, which describes how to establish an asbestos identification and control program. It provides both background information and direction for school officials on exposure assessment and the control of asbestos-containing materials.

During the four years since publication of the guidance document, EPA has gathered additional information and has gained valuable experience in assessing the need for corrective action and in controlling the release of fibers from asbestos-containing materials. The purpose of the present document is to supplement previous EPA guidance by emphasizing recent experience and new information on asbestos control. The guidance is important not only for school officials, but also for building owners in general who may have to consider implementing an asbestos control program.

The document serves six specific functions:

- (1) To provide a current summary of data on exposure to airborne asbestos;
- (2) To identify organizational and procedural issues in establishing an asbestos control program;
- (3) To review technical issues confronted when assessing the potential for exposure to airborne asbestos in particular indoor settings;
- (4) To summarize and update information on the applicability, effectiveness, and relative costs of alternative remedial actions;
- (5) To suggest a structured process for selecting a particular course of action, given information on exposure levels, assessment methods, and abatement techniques; and
- (6) To introduce and discuss criteria for determining successful asbestos control.

Substantial scientific uncertainty accompanies many of the technical considerations in the assessment of exposure to airborne asbestos, and the success of any specific abatement action often depends on the circumstances in which it is undertaken. Nevertheless, decisions regarding the need for and types of control must be made. For those readers who previously have been involved in the Asbestos-in-Schools program, the guidance offered will serve as a review and update of familiar issues. For those confronted with the problem of controlling asbestos for the first time, the document will identify the critical issues, introduce information on asbestos exposure and control, and direct the reader toward the structured development of an asbestos control program.

The focus of this report is asbestos-containing material in friable form. Friable materials have a greater potential for fiber release and thus pose a greater hazard than other forms of asbestos-containing materials. Nonfriable materials which contain asbestos also are addressed, but only regarding the need for documentation and periodic inspection.

The report is organized in four chapters. Background information on health risks and asbestos exposure levels is presented in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 emphasizes the organizational and