FACT FILE #1

ASBESTOS INDUSTRY AND REGULATORS STILL HEAD-TO-HEAD ON SAFETY ISSUE

The federal government won't back down on its contention that all forms of asbestos are potentially dangerous. And the asbestos mining industry is pushing ahead with its counter-claim that the issue is far overblown and that some forms of asbestos are more lethal than others.

One other thing is certain: the asbestos mining industry, particularly in Canada, isn't warming to the move by the Environmental Protection Agency to shut down all forms of asbestos mining, milling and manufacturing.

It's firmly behind the hiring of Hill and Knowlton, the famous public relations agency, to combat the medical findings and studies which link asbestos exposure to cancer and other forms of lethal diseases.

The battle came to a sort of head last June when the Occupational Safety and Health Administration released its new asbestos regulations in The Federal Register. In the regs, the government's thrust was evident: no "safe" forms of asbestos exist... and that includes Chrysotile, known as "white asbestos."

As for the other forms, Amosite, or "brown asbestos," and Crocidolite, or "blue asbestos," no one is pushing the idea that these forms are unsafe.

Much of the controversy between what is dangerous and what isn't can be traced to some studies which point out the differences in fibers between Chrysotile and its more dangerous family members. "White asbestos" allegedly features fiber bundles that are longer and more flexible, while the "brown and blue" types have fiber bundles which are far more brittle and which tend to break down into thinner (and more dangerous) fibers.

The argument that Amosite and Crocidolite were probably the more dangerous of the three types was quickly re-stated, particularly by industry sources, as not all asbestos types should be labeled equally dangerous. With the publication of the new OSHA regs, that argument quickly got the official boot.

OSHA labeled such industry representations as "inconclusive and inconsistent." A study by Dr. John Davis, of the Institute of Occupational medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland, reported that "chrysotile produced the greatest number of mesothelioma tumors at every dose tested ... both by fiber number and by fiber mass..."

Despite the stringency of the new regs, they've still not been accepted unanimously. The Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, claims the standards will need to be made even tougher through court review. And the Asbestos Information Association has, along with the AFL-CIO, filed a petition for review of the standards.

The union organization filed a petition for review in the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, contending that the best permissible exposure level to protect workers is 0.1 fibers per cubic centimeter. The action level should be half of the amount adopted, the suit claims.

FACT FILE #2

AIHA PUBLISHES GUIDELINES ON ASBESTOS ABATEMENT

The best way to minimize human exposure to asbestos during and after an abatement project is with careful planning; clear and complete specifications and quality supervision, according to a newly published report of the American Hygiene Association (AIHA).

The report also suggests that due to their scientific and technical backgrounds, only certified industrial hygienists, professional engineers and registered architects meeting necessary educational and experience requirements are qualified to manage asbestos abatement projects.

Entitled, "*Recommendations for Asbestos Abatement Projects*," the report is the first public position on the most professional and practical approaches to this subject to come directly from the scientists with expertise in the field of handling hazardous materials. It is a planning guideline for industrial hygiene professionals, contractors and building owners and managers who are faced with asbestos abatement issues.

These concerns are addressed in the report:

- Who is most qualified to be involved at the various levels and stages of asbestos abatement/risk assessment efforts
- Major technical issues related to the successful completion of an asbestos abatement project.

GLEASON-001149