

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH REPORTER

Standards

**OSHA REVISION OF ASBESTOS RULE
EXCLUDES CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

Revisions to the current safety and health standard for asbestos proposed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration would reduce the permissible exposure limit to an eight-hour time-weighted average of 0.5 fibers per cubic centimeter of air except for construction activities.

Permissible levels for the construction industry would continue under the present standard which has a ceiling limitation of 10 fibers per cubic centimeter. A separate rulemaking is planned for revising the asbestos standard for construction, OSHA said.

Other major provisions of the OSHA proposal which would revise 1910.1001 are as follows:

- The ceiling limit would be reduced to five fibers per cubic centimeter as determined during any 15-minute sampling period.
- There would be additional requirements for regulated areas, worker rosters, hygiene facilities, worker training and information programs, signs and labels, and monitoring and medical surveillance programs.
- The period for retention of monitoring and medical records would be extended to 40 years, or for the duration of the worker's employment plus 20 years.

Principal industries affected by the proposal are asbestos fiber processing, manufacture of asbestos-containing products, construction, shipbuilding, automobile industry, and automobile repair. According to OSHA estimates, approximately 50,000 workers are involved in the manufacture of asbestos-containing products. The total number of workers exposed to asbestos is not known.

The proposed revision does not contain an anticipated effective date.

Regulated Areas

The proposal would require that any work area where a person may be exposed to airborne concentrations of asbestos fibers in excess of the permissible limit be designated as a regulated area.

The following regulations would apply to all regulated areas:

- Only authorized personnel would be allowed in the areas.
- A daily roster of all personnel entering the areas would be maintained.

Monitoring

According to the proposal, monitoring must be performed in a manner that will measure accurately the airborne asbestos concentrations in the workplace to which employees would be exposed if they worked in the area without personal protective equipment. It may not be necessary to monitor every exposed worker to satisfy this requirement, the proposal noted.

Other monitoring requirements proposed by the revision are as follows:

- Employers must conduct initial monitoring of all work sites where asbestos fibers might be released to determine the level of worker exposure.
- If initial monitoring shows that the asbestos concentrations are above the permissible limit, the monitoring must be repeated every month. If they are below the permissible limit, they must be repeated every three months.
- All monitoring must be done with a membrane filter method with phase contrast illumination.
- Within five days after receiving the results of monitoring, employers must notify their workers in writing of the results.
- Employees must be given the opportunity to observe the monitoring.

Compliance Methods

According to the proposal, worker exposure to asbestos would be controlled to or below the permissible limit by engineering controls, work practices, and personal protective equipment.

Engineering controls would be instituted immediately to reduce worker exposure. Where engineering and work practice controls are not sufficient to reduce exposure to or below the permissible limit, they would be used nonetheless and supplemented by use of respirators.

Employers also would be required to establish a written program to reduce exposure to or below the permissible limit solely by means of engineering and work practices controls. The written program would include a description of each exposed operation, engineering plans and studies used to determine the controls, a report of the technology considered, monitoring data, and a detailed schedule for utilizing the controls.

Respirators

The proposed revisions specify that respirators may not be used to achieve compliance with the permissible exposure limit except in the following cases:

- During the period necessary to install engineering or work.
- In work situations where engineering controls and supplemental work practice controls are insufficient to reduce exposure to or below the permissible limit.
- In emergencies.

Where respirators are permitted, the proposal specifies that the employer must select them from a list of those approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

The proposal specifies also that no worker will be assigned to tasks requiring a respirator if an examining physician has determined that the worker would be unable to function normally while wearing one.

Personal Protective Clothing

Under the proposal the employer would be required to provide personal protective clothing such as coveralls, head coverings, gloves and foot coverings for all workers exposed to asbestos concentrations exceeding the prescribed limits. He also would be obligated to require the use of such clothing by his workers.

Other requirements relating to protective clothing are as follows:

- Clean and dry clothing would be provided to each worker at least daily.
- The employer would be required to clean, launder, and maintain the clothing.
- The employer would be required to insure that protective clothing is removed only in authorized change rooms.
- The employer would be required to insure that workers do not remove the clothing from the change rooms.
- All contaminated clothing would be placed in impermeable closed containers.
- The employer would be required to inform personnel laundering the clothing contaminated by asbestos of the harmful effects of exposure.

In addition to change rooms, the employer would be required to have appropriate shower and lavatory facilities.

Medical Surveillance

Medical exams required by the proposal would be conducted at the employer's expense. Where workers refuse to take the exams, the employer would obtain a signed statement from the worker that he has been informed of the consequences and refuses to be examined.

The following medical exams are required by the proposal:

- Preplacement. The employer would provide each worker a comprehensive medical exam within 30 days following his first employment in an area exposed to airborne concentrations of asbestos.

- Employers would be required to provide annual comprehensive medical exams to exposed workers.

- Employers would be required to provide medical exams to exposed workers within 30 calendar days before or after termination of employment.

The proposal specifies also that no worker should be exposed to asbestos in such a way as would increase the risk of material impairment of this health.

Training and Information

Employers would be required under the proposal to provide a training program for workers assigned to regulated areas. The program would be provided at the time of initial assignment and at least annually thereafter.

A copy of the final OSHA standard and its appendices must be readily available to workers in regulated areas.

Specified also in the proposal are labeling requirements and housekeeping requirements. Under the latter, employers would be required to maintain all exposed surfaces in the workplace free from accumulations of asbestos fibers if their dispersion would create airborne concentrations in excess of the permissible limit. Waste would be disposed of in sealed impermeable bags or other closed containers.

Recordkeeping Requirements

Employers would be required by the proposal to maintain the following records:

- Exposure records pertaining to worker exposure to asbestos.

- Medical records for each worker subject to medical surveillance.

- Mechanical ventilation requirements.

- Employee training records.

- Designated rosters.

All records maintained by the employer would be available on request to the Assistant Secretary of Labor and the director of NIOSH.

When the employer ceases to do business, the records must be transmitted to his successor or, if there is no successor, to NIOSH.

The OSHA proposal for asbestos will appear in the Full Text section of the next Current Report.