

'Bad stuff': U.S. moves to phase out asbestos products

SAGINAW, MICHIGAN—Oct. 1984
By Newhouse News Service

WASHINGTON — Four products that contain asbestos — and account for about 50 percent of the cancer-causing mineral used in manufacturing today — are likely to be banned by the federal government by the end of the year. Use of remaining asbestos products is expected to be phased out over the next 10 years.

Two proposals developed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency have been under review by the Office of Management and Budget for several months. OMB has questioned the ban and phaseout action as too costly.

The ban on four product categories includes cement pipe and fittings where asbestos is used as a strengthener; roofing felts, the long rolls of black tar-like paper on which roofing asphalt is poured; flooring felts (and felt-backed floor sheets), which are similar to roofing felts but used between the sub-floor and the vinyl to prevent rotting; and floor tile, in which the asbestos is mixed with the vinyl.

EPA maintains that these products account for about 50 percent of the asbestos used in manufacturing today and "can be replaced by readily available, competitively priced substitutes," according to a draft EPA notice to be published in the Federal Register.

Bob Pigg, executive director of the Asbestos Information Association, an industry trade group composed of asbestos miners, manufacturers, and fabricators in North America, said his group opposes the proposed EPA ban and phaseout.

The phaseout is expected to cover hundreds of other products ranging from brake linings and clutch plates, gaskets, undercoating of cars and the top of baseball dugouts, to name a few.

Asbestos used in most products can be replaced by fiberglass or organic fibers such as aramid.

No final decision has been reached on the ban or phaseout, but EPA Administrator William D. Ruckelshaus said he is confident the agency will be able to take action by the end of the year under the Toxic Substances Control Act, the country's major chemical-control law.

"Asbestos is bad stuff," Ruckelshaus recently told reporters. "We are looking at both a ban and a phaseout of the future production of asbestos. We have two broad problems: One is what do we do

about the existing asbestos that already has been used, whether in brake linings or buildings or whatever. And what do we do about continued use of asbestos."

Ruckelshaus said the phaseout was the more significant action because it would cover products that consumers come into contact with daily.

"The question is: Can you produce products using asbestos that essentially lock the asbestos (fibers) in (place) so it does not become a threat?" Ruckelshaus said.

EPA is studying a recent request from the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental law group, to ban asbestos in brake linings.

Asbestos has been in widespread use throughout the country for several decades. For many years, it was used as insulation for buildings, where it now presents a health threat.

An estimated 15 million children and 1.4 million school workers are threatened by asbestos that is deteriorating in thousands of the country's schools.

EPA is implementing the Asbestos School Hazard Abatement Act of 1984. Under provisions of the law, EPA is required to make grants and loans available from \$50 million appropriated by Congress to remedy asbestos problems in schools. The money will be available beginning in June 1985. It probably will cost about \$2 billion to remedy asbestos problems in schools across the country and will be paid for primarily by local districts.

EPA randomly sampled 231 commercial and federal buildings and residential apartments and concluded that 20 percent of these buildings — or 700,000 nationwide — contain materials with asbestos.

Asbestos comes from a group of minerals known as silicates, that can be separated into thin, strong fibers. If the fibers are breathed in, they are likely to remain in the body for a lifetime.

Asbestos is an undisputed human carcinogen. The fibers cause lung cancer; asbestiosis, a chronic scarring of the lungs that makes it more difficult to breathe; and mesothelioma, a cancer of the membranes that line the chest and abdomen. People almost never survive mesothelioma and people who have not been exposed to asbestos rarely develop the disease.

Asbestos was sold by the bag in hardware stores until it was banned by the Consumer Product Safety Commission about five years ago.

PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT

CAP-1705

NATION

.....FROM THE DESK OF
WILLIAM R. PERRELL
Vice President-Sales

10-29-84

Route; ~~WTD~~
~~WTD~~
~~WTD~~