

B U L L E T I N

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October 7, 1975

OSHA PROPOSED NEW ASBESTOS STANDARD

Enclosed is a copy of an article as it appeared in the New York Times of Sunday October 5, 1975. The full publication of the proposed standard will be in the Federal Register on October 9, 1975.

The proposed new standard is rough. The current regulations call for the 5 fibers/cc limit to be reduced to 2 fiber/cc on July 1, 1976. This new proposal calls for a standard of 0.5 fibers/cc (effective date not established).

I have excerpted some of the more significant parts of the OSHA proposed standard (from a covering letter from the Asbestos Information Association):

1. Reduce the permissible exposure limit to a TWA of 0.5 fibers per cubic centimeter (500,000 fibers per cubic meter) and reduce the ceiling limit to 5 fibers per cubic centimeter (5 million fibers per cubic meter).
2. Add a 15 minute sampling period for determination of the ceiling limit.
3. Establish additional requirements for regulating areas, employee rosters, hygiene facilities, employee information and training, signs and labels, monitoring and medical surveillance.
4. Extend the period for retention of monitoring and medical records to 40 years or for the duration of the employees' employment plus 20 years, whichever is longer.

It would appear that comments on technical feasibility, costs to the employer, and possible plant shut-downs might have some bearing on adoption of this stringent new standard.

From the draft copy I have seen, they are asking for objections or comments prior to December 8, 1975. Written data should be in quadruplicate to:

Docket Officer, Docket H-033
U.S. Department of Labor
Room N-3620
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210
Telephone (202) 523-8076

Again, this proposed new standard will be in the Federal Register of October 9, 1975.

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NEW YORK TIMES - SUNDAY OCTOBER 5, 1975

THE PROPOSED OSHA ASBESTOS STANDARD REVISION

NEW RULES URGED FOR ASBESTOS RISK

Labor Department Seeking
Reduction in Exposure of
Workers and Families

By JANE BRODY

The United States Department of Labor has proposed a new standard to protect workers and their families from the lung-scarring and cancer-causing effects of asbestos, a mineral of a thousand uses to which millions of American workers are exposed.

The existing asbestos standard, which has been widely contested by labor groups, was designed only to prevent asbestosis, a scarring of the lungs that, if severe, can turn a worker into a cripple in a respirator.

However, the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration said in its proposal that new information had developed showing that the existing standard would not prevent asbestosis and would certainly not prevent asbestos-caused cancers.

Cancers, especially those involving the lung, gastrointestinal tract and lining of the chest and abdominal cavities, have accounted for more than 40 per cent of deaths among some groups of asbestos workers, a rate three to four times higher than that in the general population.

In addition, studies in South Africa and New Jersey have shown that the families of asbestos workers also face an increased cancer risk because they are exposed to asbestos fibers carried home on the workers' clothing.

Delayed Fiber Effect

Asbestos enters the body mainly through inhalation. It may also be ingested in food or drink contaminated with the mineral fibers. Once in the body, the fibers tend to persist, remaining dormant for many years. However, 20 or more years later, cancers caused by these fibers may become clinically apparent.

The Labor Department's proposed standard would greatly reduce the amount of asbestos fibers now allowable in the air a worker breathes and would sharply reduce a lower standard scheduled to take effect next year. Currently the standard permits a level of five million fibers per cubic meter of air. This was to have been reduced to two million fibers per cubic meter by next July.

The two million level was decided upon on the basis of experience in one British asbestos factory, where a study of 290 men indicated that, at about twice that level, only a small percentage of workers exposed for 10 years or longer developed lung scarring.

However, these workers have since been re-examined, and X-ray evidence of lung abnormalities was found in 40 to 70 per cent of the same group of workers in addition, a number of asbestos-related cancers was found.

The proposed standard would reduce worker exposure to asbestos to 500,000 fibers per cubic meter, averaged over an eight-hour day, with a maximum exposure at any one time of five million fibers. Workers would have to be educated as to the hazards of asbestos and how to avoid them and tested periodically to be sure they were suffering no ill effects.

Records Kept Longer

Records of both the medical examinations and tests of asbestos levels in the work environment would have to be kept for 40 years, or for the duration of the worker's employment plus 20 years, whichever is longer. The current standard requires retention of medical records for 20 years and monitoring of records for only three years.

Employers would also be required under the new standards to provide shower and change rooms for asbestos workers to guard against their inadvertently carrying the fibers home. No food, drink or smoking would be allowed where asbestos was used and workers would have to wash thoroughly before eating during the work day.

The new standard would cover an estimated total of 50,000 workers involved in the manufacture of asbestos-containing products and about 40,000 field insulation workers who are exposed to asbestos dust, plus many thousands of others who work with products that contain asbestos.

The standard would not cover millions of workers in the construction industry, where three-fourths of all asbestos products are used. The Labor Department said it intended to formulate a separate standard for these workers, since they are usually employed in nonfixed work places and tend to be highly transient.

The Labor Department must now prepare an environmental impact and an inflationary impact statement before holding a hearing on the proposed standard.

In addition to asbestos standards, the department last week issued proposed new standards to limit worker exposure to lead and toluene, both widely used hazardous industrial substances, and established procedures for handling other toxic chemicals in the work environment.

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