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Memorandum



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March 7, 1984

To: ORC Respirator Task Force

From: Darrell K. Mattheis

Subject: Asbestos and Respirators vs Engineering Controls

We have recently heard from several sources that OSHA intends to press for a more stringent interpretation of the conditions under which respirators may be used in place of engineering controls.

It also appears likely that hearings for the Asbestos NPR will become a battle ground over respirators vs. engineering controls. OSHA has commissioned a study by the Los Alamos Laboratories Respirator Group, to study the effectiveness of the generally used respirators against asbestos fibers. We have heard that some of the early results showed greater than expected penetration of the filter media by asbestos fibers. It is possible that OSHA will use this study for leverage in an attempt to restrict the use of respirators for compliance with the standard. We have heard that as a minimum, OSHA may require the use of High Efficiency Particulate filters on any respirator used for compliance with the asbestos standard.

As of Friday, March 2, 1984 the NPR was still at OMB, not signed, and waiting for OSHA to make some requested changes. As long as OSHA allows flexibility in the use of respirators, OMB will probably sign off on a PEL of 0.2. Without the provision for respirator use, however, OMB would most likely not release the document. If OSHA wants to issue an NPR restricting the use of respirators, they could attempt it without OMB approval, assuming that in an election year the Administration would not want to be seen as "soft" on asbestos, and would not pull them back!

At any rate, the NPR should be out around the end of the second week in March 1984. If OSHA follows its draft NPR, hearings will be scheduled the first Tuesday 60 days after publication of the NPR, which would place it around the middle of June.

We should be considering the arguments that need to be made to justify the flexible use of respirators in the workplace. We must have data to back up our position, and if we do not we will not be listened to! Any studies done internally that demonstrate the effectiveness of respirators in the industrial environment, and do so in a convincing way, would be most valuable. Look around and see what you can find; let me know if you come up with anything useful, it is important!

Darrell K. Matthews

DKM:jt