



by Donald Reed, Washington Editor

## Asbestos

On January 23, 1986, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed to ban the use of five major asbestos products and to phase out all remaining uses of asbestos in this country over the next ten years. Friction products, such as automotive brake and clutch linings, would be banned in five years. On July 15, 1986, EPA opened a two-week long series of public meetings to hear from all concerned.

EPA says that 240,000 metric tons of asbestos were used in the U.S. during 1984, and that asbestos causes 3300 to 12,000 cancer cases per year, almost all of which are fatal. The EPA proposed ban and phase-out is expected to save 1900 cancer deaths over the next fifteen years. EPA Administrator Lee Thomas said "No level of exposure is without risk," as he announced the total ban and phase-out. Asbestos is a known carcinogen that causes lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the chest and abdominal lining, and has several other dreadful capabilities as well.

This regulatory action, which of course would cripple the asbestos mining and manufacturing industries, will certainly be hotly argued, and will probably end up in the court systems. The White Lung Association cites the death and misery asbestos has caused in the past and present, and calls for a complete ban on all asbestos use immediately. They say too that as many as 35 percent of spouses and children of asbestos workers contract respiratory disease.

The Asbestos Information Association (industry) agrees that the health hazard posed by the uncontrolled use of asbestos cannot be refuted, and that high and prolonged exposure of workers to asbestos dust in the workplace some 30 to 40 years ago

has left an unparalleled legacy of disease. However, it claims that great progress has been made in the controlled use of asbestos, to the point where now, and continuing into the future, asbestos workers are faced with no higher health risks than any other workers. Moreover, it states that products which were used in the past which released asbestos dust are no longer used today, such as asbestos insulation boards. Where asbestos is used, new chemical and manufacturing techniques are used to encapsulate, or lock in, asbestos fibers. Also, The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has just established more stringent workplace standards.

The U.S. is not alone in trying to deal with asbestos hazards, but we are the only country in the world proposing a total ban. The rest of the world, recognizing the superior performance qualities of asbestos, the fact that substitutes are not available for all asbestos products, and that some substitute fibers may prove to be just as hazardous, have opted instead for the controlled continued use of asbestos. The Quebec Minister of State of Mines said "... The EPA proposal is not only regrettable but it is a contradiction with the results of the most recent studies on the effects of asbestos use."

The asbestos product most closely associated with our industry is friction materials. Many motor vehicle brake systems rely on asbestos-containing friction material to meet performance requirements of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) as well as customer expectations. General Motors says the task of engineering systems that use non-asbestos friction materials is enormous. No effective substitute has

yet been found for a sizeable number of these systems. Especially difficult problems are heavy truck brakes and replacement linings for systems already in the field. Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence that brake dust poses any harm to mechanics or bystanders. Wagner, a division of Cooper Industries, and a major distributor of friction materials, tells EPA "There is considerable evidence that this debris contains little, if any, asbestos since the asbestos fibers originally contained in the resin bonded brake lining are converted to an inert material as a result of the heat generated by the braking process. This inert material, termed forsterite, has not been demonstrated to be dangerous to individuals or the environment.

Industry says EPA has overestimated the risk arising from asbestos friction products. As a result, the urgency of a total and expedited phase-down of asbestos in these uses is not warranted. Whether EPA will back down from the hard line position it has taken remains to be seen. One thing seems imperative, however—they must consult with NHTSA to be sure that one set of problems is not simply traded for another.

#### **Executive branch activities**

**Occupant crash protection**—The June 17, 1986 Federal Register (page 21912) contained NHTSA Docket 74-14, Notice 44, a final rule responding to petitions for reconsideration of the comfort and convenience performance requirements for manual and automatic seat belt assemblies under FMVSS 208, Occupant Crash Protection, (November 6, 1985 Federal Register). The petitions requested changes regarding webbing tension-relieving devices, torso belt body contact force, belt retraction, and folding armrests. For further information contact Dick Strombotne, NHTSA Office of Vehicle Safety Standards, (202) 426-2264.

**Seating systems**—The July 2, 1986 Federal Register (page 24176) contained NHTSA Docket 86-04, Notice 1, an FMVSS 207, Seating Systems, NPRM proposing that a specific release control (i.e., a knob, lever, push button, etc.) would not be required

on folding seats equipped with a self-locking device for restraining the seat back, if there are no seats behind the folding seat. The standard currently requires a specific control for releasing the seat back whether there are seats behind or not. Comments were due September 2, 1986. For further information contact Guy Hunter, NHTSA Office of Vehicle Safety Standards, (202) 426-2264.

**Seating reference point**—The June 5, 1986 Federal Register (page 20536) contained NHTSA Docket 82-05, Notice 2, a proposed amendment to the definition of seating reference point (SRP) to make it clear that the SRP is independent of the length of the manikin's legs. In addition, NHTSA terminated consideration of a proposal to require manufacturers to specify the location of a vehicle's SRP by placing permanent marks or points on the vehicle structure; and a proposal to amend several safety standards containing visibility requirements, by changing the reference to a driver's eye range. Comments were due August 6, 1986. For further information contact Ken Rutland, NHTSA Office of Crash Avoidance, (202) 426-2154.

**Controls and displays**—The June 18, 1986 Federal Register (page 22092) contained a NHTSA notice denying a petition for rulemaking submitted by a private individual requesting that the location of motor vehicle controls and displays be standardized (FMVSS 101, Controls and Displays). The petitioner argued that standardization would avoid driver confusion when driving different vehicles. For further information contact Kevin Cavey, NHTSA Office of Vehicle Safety Standards, (202) 426-2153.

**Lighting**—The June 13, 1986 Federal Register (page 21696) contained NHTSA Docket 81-11, Notice 19, a supplemental notice to an earlier proposed rule (May 13, 1985) for three new types of standardized replaceable light sources for use in replaceable bulb headlamp systems. Two of the new light sources, HB3 and HB4, were recently adopted in a final rule published in the May 2, 1986 Federal Register. For the third light source, HB2, NHTSA requested comments on an amendment to the proposal, which contained additional figures to de-

# Asbestos ban will force new brake linings

From Press Staff, AP and UPI

Officials in the domestic auto industry said Thursday that the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed phaseout of asbestos over the next decade will mean the end of asbestos linings in car and truck brakes and clutches.

A General Motors Corp. official also predicted the change will increase the price of vehicles. However, the amount of the increase cannot be determined yet, said Richard Klimisch, executive director of the GM environmental activities staff.

"It depends on how fast we do it and what material we use (to substitute for the asbestos)," he said. The cost, which could run into the millions of dollars for the auto companies, would reflect studies, redesign and tooling costs for new brakes, he said.

Officials at Ford Motor Co. and Allied Automotive of Southfield, a major brake supplier, downplayed the effect of the asbestos phaseout, saying it had been anticipated for several years and will not disrupt the industry.

"We already have a program in place to phase out asbestos," said Ford spokeswoman Linda Lee. "It's just part of our new product development."

She said she did not have an estimate of the cost of the changes.

John Coxeter, spokesman for Allied, said his company is building a new plant in Florida to manufacture asbestos-free products. The price of the brakes may increase, but that will depend on what kind of synthetic materials are used as substitutes for asbestos, he said, adding he could not disclose specifics about the materials because they are proprietary.

THE EPA's phaseout of asbestos, proposed Thursday, was prompted by concern that the substance causes up to 12,000 cancer cases annually in the United States.

Auto industry officials said brake linings are not dangerous to drivers or workers in auto plants who install them on the vehicles.

Nevertheless, the EPA's proposed phaseout, which starts with a ban on five major categories of asbestos products, includes elimination of asbestos from brake linings.

The EPA proposed an immediate ban on asbestos use in five categories, mostly covering construction products. Over the next decade, EPA said, it wants to cleanse the environment of all products containing the carcinogen.

The decision, attacked by an industry group as unwarranted, culminated more than six years of regulatory debate within the government and months of infighting between EPA and the Office of Management and Budget. EPA Administrator Lee Thomas said it would take about a year for the agency to complete public hearings and administrative review of the proposed asbestos rule, which has been in the works since late 1979.

The ban, when fully implemented, would avert as many as 1,900 deaths from asbestos-related lung cancer over the next 15 years, Thomas said.

"We are taking this action because of the significant and well-documented threat to health that asbestos represents," he said. "No level of exposure is without risk."

THOMAS' AGENCY already has a program to remove asbestos materials from the nation's public schools.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce oversight and investigations subcommittee and a longtime EPA critic, called the action "long overdue."

The action announced Thursday launches a process to rid America of the substance, which "is present in the ambient air and presents a serious health risk to the American people," the administrator said.

The initial ban would affect five product categories that now contain from one-third to one-half of the approximately 300,000 metric tons of asbestos used by U.S. manufacturers each year.

Thomas said effective substitute materials are available for clothing used by fire fighters and workers in high-temperature areas, roofing materials, flooring felt, floor tiles and cement pipe and fittings.

Over 10 years, he said, asbestos importation and manufacture would be phased out for all other products, including auto brake and clutch linings, as substitutes are developed.

GM's Klimisch said automakers have been working to eliminate asbestos for the last decade, and GM already has gotten rid of asbestos linings in the front brakes of its cars.

Ford's Lee said Ford has been using new brake materials in recently introduced vehicles such as the Aerostar minivan.

A Chrysler spokesman said the company had no immediate comment.

All asbestos-containing products not covered by the initial ban would be required to carry warning labels, said EPA's Thomas, predicting that "this phaseout will lead to total elimination of asbestos as a production use in America."

Thomas estimated the proposed rule would cost the U.S. economy about \$2 billion through 2000. "Spread across the population this would average less than \$10 per consumer over 15 years," he said.

THE AGENCY estimates that asbestos is responsible each year for 3,300 to 12,000 new cancer cases, nearly all of them fatal within five years.

Thomas said he expects the proposed rule to be "widely and actively" debated over the next year, but he added: "Ultimately, I don't think there can be debate about the health risks of asbestos."

The proposal was attacked by the Asbestos Information Association, which said it was unwarranted and inconsistent with a controlled-use approach favored by European nations and the United Nations' International Labor Organization.

"Under controlled use, asbestos does not present significant risk to the public and the workers," said Ken Nyquist, a spokesman for the association.

Nyquist also questioned the safety of asbestos substitutes.

Thomas said substitutes "appear to present lower risk" and that EPA would be testing the safety of other materials developed to replace asbestos.

## Asbestos: Risks and remedies

By DAVID EVERETT

From Press Staff, AP and UPI

Q. What is asbestos?

A. Asbestos is the name for any of a group of naturally occurring minerals made up of thin, strong fibers. It is chemically inert and resistant to heat and thus is useful, but it also can be harmful to humans.

Q. How is it used?

A. Asbestos was once a popular fireproofing, soundproofing and insulating material. Asbestos products include roofing materials, automotive brake linings, protective clothing, and various types of insulation for ceilings, walls, floors and pipes. From 1940 until 1973, asbestos was sprayed on ceilings and other parts of thousands of schools and other public and private buildings in the United States.

Q. How can asbestos affect us?

A. Asbestos can break down into tiny fibers much smaller than ordinary dust. This can occur when manufacturing or construction work involves asbestos, when asbestos-containing materials deteriorate, or when asbestos is not properly bonded to a material. The dust floats in the air and is easily inhaled.

Q. What are the health risks from this dust?

A. Studies have shown that breathing asbestos fibers can cause various types of cancer, including fatal cancers of the lung, stomach and chest. Another risk is asbestosis, a chronic, often fatal, lung disease which makes it difficult to breathe. Asbestos is especially harmful to cigarette smokers. It can affect workers who use the material on the job, or it can be a risk to anyone who works, lives or goes to

school in a building where the dust is present. The mere presence of asbestos materials in a building may not be dangerous. The risk comes only when asbestos fibers get into the air.

Q. What's being done?

A. Besides the new proposal to be many current uses of asbestos, there are federal limits on worker exposure and bans on sprayed asbestos materials. Because children are thought to be more susceptible to asbestos dust, the federal government requires schools districts to inspect for potential asbestos problems in schools.

Q. Is the danger over?

A. No. Many school districts across the nation, including some in Michigan, have not completed the inspections. Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency charged the Detroit Public Schools and 21 other Michigan school districts with various program violations. Removal of asbestos in schools and other buildings is proceeding slowly, primarily because of the cost. Detroit schools spent more than \$200,000 in recent years on asbestos removal, but millions may be needed statewide before the cleanup is complete.

Q. What can I do if I have questions about my home, school or workplace?

A. At work, talk to your union or management. For schools, contact your local school district. For your home, contact your local or state health department, or the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (toll-free number: 1-800-638-2772). The EPA also has a toll-free toxic substance information hotline, 1-800-424-9065.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the American Lung Association were the sources for this report.

## Injudicious jeans are shown door in Wayne County court

JEANS, from Page 1A

Drawn codes similar

