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Sprayed-asbestos fireproofing work halted

Sprayed-asbestos fireproofing operations on steel-framed buildings halted last week in New York City. The stoppage resulted from regulations written after medical research showed that asbestos fibers can cause cancer of the pulmonary and gastro-intestinal tracts if inhaled (ENR 4/2 p. 11).

New York City's Department of Air Resources prepared the regulations and put them into effect three weeks ago. Last week, inspectors issued summonses alleging that the fireproofing subcontractors on three building projects were in violation of the regulations. The asbestos-spray contractor on a fourth building voluntarily halted work. City officials report that the four buildings are the only jobs in the city where fireproofing operations have been under way.

Continued violations could result in departmental hearings leading to the sealing of asbestos-spraying machinery by the city.

The four projects are one of the two 110-story towers of the World Trade Center, the 54-story Standard Oil (N.J.) building near Rockefeller Center, a 40-story building at 2 New York Plaza in the financial district, and a 37-story structure in midtown Manhattan.

Ironically, the World Trade Center project was the first and only building in the city where the spray contractor had taken precautions to prevent scattering of dried asbestos. The owner, the Port of New York Authority, cooperated with the city months ago as a result of the medical studies conducted by a team of physicians.

The building's exterior on the floor

where asbestos was being sprayed was tightly enclosed by tarpaulins and the asbestos-spray work area was sealed off from other interior sections. The job, however, lacked the vacuum cleaning operation as required by the regulations, according to a Port Authority official.

Empire Pyro Spray Inc., New York City, asbestos-spray subcontractor on the New York Plaza building, was summoned to a hearing by Robert N. Rickles, commissioner of the Department of Air Resources. Although the company has stopped work, the hearing was called after the company issued a guarantee it would comply fully with the regulations in the future, according to department officials. This move could lead to the first court test of the regulation.