United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of
Public Affairs (A-107)
Washington DC 20460

EPA Environmental News

FOR RELEASE: THURSDAY, JULY 6, 1989

Luke Hester 202-382-4383

EPA ANNOUNCES FINAL REGULATION TO BAN NEW ASBESTOS PRODUCTS

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today banned almost all asbestos-containing products in the United States in stages over the next seven years. The ban will apply to new product manufacture, importation and processing. It affects at least 94 percent of U.S. production and imports, based on 1985 production-volume estimates.

"This is pollution-prevention. We're eliminating a known cancer-causing substance from the marketplace. Virtually all asbestos-containing products will be replaced with safer alternatives," said EPA Administrator William K. Reilly.

The final rule, promulgated under the Toxic Substances Control Act (section 6), bans manufacturing, importing and processing of most U.S. asbestos products in three stages, beginning with certain products on Sept. 1, 1990, and with others on the same date in 1993 and 1996. Corresponding bans on distribution will occur in 1992, 1994 and 1997. A primary factor in determining the stage at which a category of products should be banned was the agency's projection of the availability of a safe substitute for each asbestos product. (A list of the banned products and phaseout stages is attached).

The rule bans, among other things, the use of asbestos in automotive vehicle brakes, beginning with 1994 models. Replacement brakes must be made of non-asbestos products by 1996. The rule also bans asbestos in most automotive and other gaskets in 1993 and the production of asbestos/cement pipe and asbestos shingles in 1996. Also in 1996, the use of asbestos in roof and other coatings will be banned.

HWBUI0005884

Estimated costs are about $459 million over 13 years.

Exposure to asbestos, a fibrous mineral, has been linked to a number of fatal diseases, including lung cancer, mesothelioma (a cancer of the chest and abdominal linings), gastro-intestinal cancer and asbestosis. It also is associated with a variety of other diseases. Controlling the risks posed by asbestos expsoure has been especially troublesome because asbestos fibers are odorless, typically minute in size, easily suspended in air and extremely durable. Humans often are exposed unknowingly to asbestos fibers with little means of protection.

Asbestos has been in widespread use in many important industrial, construction and other applications in the United States since early in this century. Although the use of asbestos has declined significantly since this rulemaking was initiated in 1979, from 561,000 metric tons to less than 85,000 metric tons today, there is continued significant use in a variety of products.

Despite government actions to reduce asbestos emissions in the workplace, fibers continue to be released during the production, use and disposal of asbesto products. These ongoing additions of asbestos fibers into the environment pose a significant risk to current and future populations in the United States and are unnecessary since safer substances can be substituted for asbestos in the products in question.

Reilly recommended against unnecessary replacement of certain asbestos-containing products.

"Disturbing asbestos brakes, shingles or siding already in place, when there is no health or safety reason to do so, can cause a much greater health hazard than leaving them in place. If asbestos-containing products must be replaced, consumers should seek professional advice and assistance in identifying safe substitutes and in properly removing the asbestos product," Reilly said.

Reilly noted that the ban and phasedown rule announced today does not affect existing asbestos materials in commercial or public buildings. Building owners should continue to use trained professionals to inspect and assess the condition of asbestos-containing materials before deciding whether abatement action is appropriate.

Minimal economic impact is expected from the elimination of asbestos because of the availability of safe substitutes, such as wood-based products, e.g., cellulose fiber products, and construction products made of brick and concrete.

Reilly added that the rule's ban of asbestos/cement pipe or other products "should not be seen as a signal to other nations, especially developing countries, that use of these products should be discontinued. The actions taken in this rule are based on an evaluation of the specific uses of these products in the United States, the availability of substitutes

HWBUI0005885

in the U.S. market and other factors that may be unique to this country. A similar evaluation should be performed in other countries which rely heavily on the use of asbestos products before they decide whether any similar action is appropriate," Reilly said.

Publication of the final rule in the Federal Register is scheduled for July 12. The first stage ban is scheduled to take effect Aug. 27, 1990. For further information, contact the TSCA Assistance Office (TS-799), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Room EB-44), Washington, D.C. 20460, 202-544-1404, TDD 202-554-0551.

R-130 # # #