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OSHA AND ASBESTOS

The following description is provided to acquaint users of asbestos based insulating materials with the latest OSHA Standards.

OSHA has determined that contact with asbestos fiber is a serious health hazard. The standard states:

"In view of the undisputed grave consequences from exposure to asbestos fibers, it is essential that the exposure be regulated now, on the basis of the best evidence available now, even though it may not be as good as scientifically desirable. An asbestos standard can be re-evaluated in light of the results of ongoing studies, and future studies, but cannot wait for them. Lives of employees are at stake."

The above paragraph in essence sets the tone of the entire OSHA standard for asbestos. In fact, OSHA considers asbestos a serious enough material to have a separate section devoted to it.

The particular section covering asbestos is 1910.93 a under Air Borne Contaminants Section 1910.93.

The threshold limit valve (TLV) for asbestos on an 8-hour time weighted average is no more than 5 fibers, longer than 5 micometers, per cubic centimeter of air. To measure, if the TLV is exceeded, samples shall be collected within the breathing zone of the employees on a membrane filter of 0.8 micrometer porosity mounted on an open-face filter holder. Determination of the asbestos level is made at a magnification of 400-450 with phase contrast illumination.

We are not very far into the standard and already terms are being encountered which will create confusion as to what is being said. In essence, the standard is saying not to use asbestos based materials. If you decided to use asbestos based materials the possibility of exceeding the TLV is so probable that the appropriate precautions have to be taken. The precautions are as follows:

a) All hand operated and power operated tools which may release asbestos (cutting insulating block) shall be provided with local exhaust ventilation systems which will maintain the concentration below the TLV.

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b) Insofar as practicable, asbestos shall be handled, mixed, applied, removed, cut, scored, or otherwise worked in a wet state sufficient to prevent emmission of airborne particles.

c) No asbestos cement, mortar, coating, grout, plaster or similar material containing asbestos shall be removed from bags, cartons, or other containers without being either wetted or enclosed, or ventilated to prevent release of airborne asbestos fibers.

The three sections above although making compliance somewhat awkward, do not create a condition which is impossible to work. However, the next section in our opinion is the key feature of the standard and probably creates the greatest frustration to users. The assumption is that whatever asbestos based insulation goes on must eventually come off and with that in mind the following section governs:

"Spraying, demolition or removal - Employees engaged in the spraying of asbestos, the removal, or demolition of pipes, structures or equipment covered or insulated with asbestos, and in the removal or demolition of asbestos insulation or coverings shall be provided with respiratory equipment in accordance with paragraph (d) (2) (iii) of this section and with special clothing in accordance with paragraph (d) (3) of this section".

What this section has done in effect has discarded the TLV of 5 fibers per cubic centimeter completely and has directed the user to use certain respiratory equipment and clothing.

In simple terms the respiratory equipment referred to is a supplied-air respirator either continous-flow or pressure demand type.

These types of respirators have an external source of air which the employee breathes. The external source is either from a pressure tank or via air hoses to the respirator. The special clothing includes coveralls, head covering, gloves and foot covering. The employer shall provide 2 separate lockers or containers for each employee to isolate the contaminated clothing. Laundering of contaminated clothing shall be done to prevent the release of airborne asbestos fibers. If laundering is to be done by others the clothing shall be conveyed to the launderer in sealed impermeable containers and informed the clothing is contaminated with asbestos fibers.

In addition to the above, other items in the standard state:

a) Posting of caution signs in areas where asbestos is being used
b) Waste disposal in sealed containers
c) Exposure records on each employee
d) Employees to have reasonable access to any record required to be maintained
e) Notice to employee in writing if he has been exposed to airborne concentrations of asbestos in excess of the limits prescribed.

The standard considers asbestos as a hazardous material and if a company is to use it, it has to comply with some very strict regulations. As noted, some of these regulations are so restrictive that it creates extreme difficulty as well as delays in completing projects.

A number of users have decided not to use asbestos based materials and have started using Quigley's non-asbestos "PANELEX" insulation. PANELEX has been specifically formulated without asbestos to meet OSHA standards.

PANELEX was introduced to the market in February of 1972 and has proven to be a high quality, easy to use insulation. It is available as a castable, trowel and spray mix, block and special shapes.

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