DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL
SAFETY AND HEALTH
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August 8, 1975

Dear Colleague:

This communication is intended to alert you to recently gathered information indicating a potential health hazard for persons exposed to asbestos during the servicing of motor vehicle brake and clutch assemblies.

On July 21, 1975, the National Institite for Occupational Safety and Health convened a meeting of government and university scientists, industry representatives, and labor union officials to discuss the present state of knowledge with respect to this problem. Data was presented by investigators from the Mount Siani School of Medicine in New York City indicating that workers engaged in the maintenance and repair of automobile and truck brake linings are exposed to potentially hazardous levels of airborne asbestos dust. Specific brake servicing operations studied included blow-out of automobile drum brake assemblies, grinding of used truck brake linings, and bevelling of new truck brake linings. Average peak asbestos air concentrations for these three activities based on personal samples taken within ten feet of the operator were, respectively, 10.5, 3.75, and 37.3 fibers (>5 microns in length) per ml. An analysis of samples of brake drum dust revealed that almost all of the asbestos fibers found were shorter than 0.4 microns in length.

Previous studies of the extent of asbestos emissions from automobile brake lining wear showed that only a very small fraction of the original asbestos content of the brake lining is found in brake drum dust (Ref. 1-3). It was presumed that this is due to thermal degradation of the fibers during braking. The present findings indicate that enough asbestos is preserved to produce significant exposures during certain brake servicing procedures.

The full extent of asbestos-related disease in brake servicing personnel is not known at present because this particular occupational group has not been studied systematically up to now. However, a review of the scientific literature on the association between asbestos exposure and mesothelial tumors of the pleura and peritoneum has revealed at least four cases of these rare tumors in persons who were employed in jobs involving automobile brake servicing (Ref. 4-6).

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For your information and guidance, we are enclosing pertinent references, estimates of the population at risk, a NIOSH interim recommendation for brake and clutch servicing procedures, and a copy of the Department of Labor standard covering exposure to asbestos in the work place.

The environmental studies of brake lining servicing operations outlined above together with observations of mesothelial tumors in persons so employed affirms the necessity for instituting and maintaining recommended control measures in this industry so that the health hazards of asbestos are minimized.

Sincerely yours,

J. William Lloyd, Sc.D.
Director
Office of Occupational Health
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Enclosures

FMSI 07186

REFERENCES

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5. McDonald, A.D. et al.: Epidemiology of Primary Malignant Mesothelial Tumors in Canada. Cancer, 26:914-19, 1970

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RECOMMENDED (INTERIM) PROCEDURES FOR ASBESTOS BRAKE AND CLUTCH SERVICING

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has research underway concerning dust exposures during brake and clutch servicing. Due to preliminary data demonstrating significant asbestos exposures during presently used brake and clutch servicing techniques, NIOSH has reviewed alternate techniques whereby asbestos exposures are reduced. The following are interim procedures recommended by NIOSH to minimize dust exposures.

1. If possible, an area shall be designated for all brake and clutch repairs. Entrances into this area shall be posted with an asbestos exposure warning sign as follows:

Asbestos
Dust Hazard
Avoid Breathing Dust
Wear Assigned Protective Equipment
Do Not Remain in Area Unless Your Work Requires It
Breathing Asbestos Dust May Cause Asbestosis and Cancer

2. During brake servicing, an air purifying respirator, either single use or with replaceable particulate filter(s), as approved by the Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration (formerly Bureau of Mines) or NIOSH, shall be worn during all procedures starting with the removal of the wheels and including reassembly. During manual clutch servicing, such a respirator shall be worn during removal and cleaning of the clutch, pressure plate and housing assembly and during installation of the new clutch assembly.

3. Dust shall first be cleaned from brake drums, brake backing plates, brake assemblies and clutch assemblies using an industrial type vacuum cleaner equipped with a high efficiency filter system (>99% efficiency for 0.3 μm diameter aerosols). After vacuum cleaning, any remaining dust shall be removed using a rag soaked in water and wrung until nearly dry. Under no circumstances shall compressed air or dry brushing be used for cleaning.

4. During arcing and riveting operations, an approved respirator, as described in (2) above, shall be worn. Grinding (arcing) machines shall be provided with local exhaust ventilation such that worker exposures are maintained at least below the 1976 OSHA asbestos standard (29 CFR 1910.1001).* At a minimum, the dust bag of the arcing machine shall be removed and replaced with the hose of the high efficiency industrial vacuum described in (3) above.

5. Industrial vacuum cleaner bags containing asbestos dust and cloths used for wiping brake and clutch assemblies shall be sealed in plastic bags and labeled with the following warning label printed in letters of sufficient size and contrast to be readily visible and legible:

Caution
Contains Asbestos Fibers
Avoid Breathing Dust
Breathing Asbestos Dust May Cause Asbestosis and Cancer

All asbestos waste shall be disposed of in accordance with the OSHA asbestos regulation, 29 CFR 1910.1001(h). During removal of vacuum bags, an approved respirator, as described in (2) above, shall be worn.

6. All floor cleaning in areas where brakes and clutches are repaired shall be done with the high efficiency industrial vacuum cleaner as described in (3) above. Grinding (arcing) machines shall also be cleaned with such a vacuum cleaner and any remaining dust wiped with a damp cloth. An approved respirator, as described in (2) above, shall be used during this cleaning.

7. Although adherence to the above procedures should minimize any contamination of work clothing, it is required that the appropriate portions of the OSHA regulations on asbestos (29 CFR 1910.1001(d), (3 and 4)) concerning special clothing, change rooms, etc. be followed.

NOTE: Strict adherence to the above procedures should minimize exposures to mechanics during brake and clutch servicing. These are interim recommendations and are subject to revision pending results of ongoing NIOSH research.

* Section 1910.1001 of the Code of Federal Regulations was formerly Section 1910.93a. This change was noted in the Federal Register, May 28, 1975.

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ESTIMATES OF THE WORKFORCE POTENTIALLY EXPOSED TO ASBESTOS IN THE MANUFACTURING AND SERVICING OF BRAKE LININGS AND CLUTCHES

Auto Mechanics	833,535
Garage Workers	67,679
Manufacture (original and rebuilding)	6,657
TOTAL	907,871

SOURCE: Adapted from 1972 Census of Manufacturers, 1972 County Business Patterns, and Census of Population: 1970 Occupation by Industry (all are Department of Commerce, Census Bureau publications)