

We believe there is a basic distinction between processes using raw asbestos fibers and those using asbestos-containing materials. Whenever loose fiber is used, we exercise great caution to minimize the potential release of fibers to the workplace or the ambient environment. The same care is used whenever asbestos materials are handled in such a way that loose fibers could be generated—for example, in cutting asbestos paper or grinding a brake lining.

For many asbestos-containing materials, such as adhesives, brake linings, mastics, and floor tiles, the asbestos is bound in a matrix. This matrix is either flexible—as in tar-based sound deadeners—or highly durable, as in cement asbestos products. In these kinds of materials, asbestos fiber generally is not released during our manufacturing processes unless the material is misused.

In our view, this is an important distinction. In considering risk analyses, or in considering regulations and standards, we think it is important to differentiate between applications involving loose fibers and those involving non-friable materials or encapsulated fibers. Such differentiation is not the case today—and it should be in our opinion.

The techniques and devices used by General Motors are designed to control the release of asbestos fiber.

Recently, there has been considerable discussion about the use of substitute materials for automotive friction products. While asbestos substitutes are being used in some light duty brake systems, we have not found effective substitutes for many other applications. Various substitutes for asbestos in clutch plates have been investigated, but no suitable alternatives have been found.

Certain products, therefore, will probably continue to contain or use asbestos. So we should avoid any ban on use and distribution of either original equipment or replacement parts for which there are no substitutes. In most cases, for example, non-asbestos brake linings, if installed as replacement parts, will not provide suitable performance in older brake systems designed for asbestos linings. In such cases, the configuration of the entire braking system has to be changed. Changes of this magnitude would require extensive and costly modifications and testing. Since we cannot recommend substitution of non-asbestos linings in brake systems designed for asbestos, an adequate supply of replacement asbestos linings should continue to be available. This same situation will hold for friction materials used as clutch facings in both manual and automatic transmissions.

General Motors does not use body fillers containing asbestos. However, sound deadeners today contain asbestos as an inert filler. The matrix doesn't dry to the point of becoming brittle, nor is it sanded or ground during vehicle production. Thus, asbestos fibers used in sound deadeners and other types of undercoatings really do not constitute, in our opinion, a ready source of airborne asbestos fiber.

However, we are encouraging development of substitutes for most asbestos-containing mastics, sound deadeners, and the like. For example, mineral wools, and glass fibers may be effectively substituted in some applications. Perhaps some products can be reformulated to eliminate the need for fiber fillers. But we recognize that the substitute fillers may be more costly.