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Industrial Emission Standards For 3 Air Pollutants Proposed

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 3—William D. Ruckelshaus, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, announced today proposed emission standards for industry on three hazardous air pollutants: asbestos, beryllium and mercury.

Asbestos fibers, which are used in floor tile, brake linings, asbestos paper, textiles, insulating materials and fireprpofing, can, when inhaled over long periods, cause lung cancer.

Beryllium, a highly toxic heavy metal that can cause pneumonia among those occupationally exposed, is used in machine shops, propellant plants, extraction plants and foundries. However, the hazards of beryllium exposure are rigidly controlled by industrial health regulations in force for most operations in which the metal is used.

Chronic exposure to airborne mercury can have a profound effect on the central nervous system, the symptoms of which are tremor, psychological disturbance, insomnia, loss of weight and appetite. The standards announced today are directed mostly at mercury mines and chlor-alkali plants that make chlorine and alkali caustic.

Must Give Warning

Under amendments to the Clean Air Act signed by President Nixon on Dec. 31, 1970, the administrator of the environmental agency is required to publish within 30 days a list of air pollutants that, in his judgment, might increase either mortality, serious irreversible illness or incapacitating illness, and to update this list periodically.

Within 180 days of publishing the list, the administrator is required to publish proposed emissions standards for these pollutants. Within 30 days of publishing these, he must set the time and place for public hearings on them, and then within 180 days issue final standards.

Last March 31, Mr. Ruckelshaus issued an initial list of pollutants that included asbestos, beryllium and mercury. The proposed standards were due to be published on Sept. 27. Mr. Ruckelshaus, in a news conference today, said the delay had been caused, first, by the "complexity" of the problem, which was not resolved within the E.P.A. until Sept. 26, and, second, by the need thereafter to get the views of other agencies.

Control Practices

By way of illustrating the complexity, Mr. Ruckelshaus said there were no "standardized methods" for measuring emission levels of asbestos. Therefore, he said, it has been decided to set the standards "not in terms of numerical emission values" but in "control practices that will limit emissions to an acceptable level."

Consequently, the regulations that will be published in the Federal Register next Tuesday will require the use of filters to trap asbestos fibers in gases from mining, milling, manufacturing and fabrication of asbesto-containing materials.

Further, there will be an absolute prohibition on the spraying of asbestos fireproofing and insulation, except where such spraying is done indoors and the asbestos-laden air cleaned before its release into the surrounding atmosphere. Spraying in the open air has been an issue in many large cities, particularly in New York.

Most emissions of asbestos come from mining and milling, Mr. Ruckelshaus said. The estimated average cost of complying with the standards, he said, would be nine-tenths of 1 per cent of the 1969 selling price.

For beryllium, the emission standard for most plants will be an average of one-hundredth of a microgram per cubic meter of air over a 30-day period, or a short-term exposure of 25 micrograms per cubic meter for a maximum of 30 minutes.

For mercury, the standards are designed to insure that atmospheric concentrations do not exceed one microgram per cubic meter of air averaged over 30 days.

For mercury mines, the cost of meeting the standards will be 2.5 to 3.5 per cent of product worth, and for chlor-alkali plants .5 to .9 per cent of product worth.

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