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Job-Safety Unit Sets Tough Rules for '76 On Plants' Asbestos

By WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter
WASHINGTON — The Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced tough new curbs on asbestos in plants, but gave employers four years to comply.

The new standard will limit concentrations of asbestos in the work place to two fibers per cubic centimeter of air beginning July 1, 1976, the agency administering the new Federal Job Safety Law said.

Until 1976, the asbestos standard will remain five fibers per cubic centimeter. That was the "emergency" standard imposed by the agency last December under pressure from the AFL-CIO.

The inhalation of asbestos has been linked to a number of human diseases.

The standards for asbestos represent a time-weighted average over eight hours. But, starting July 1, 1972, asbestos concentrations aren't to exceed 10 fibers per cubic centimeter of air at any time during the eight-hour period. The emergency standard currently in effect hasn't any such upper limit—only the average of five fibers.

Government sources said the four-year delay in effecting the new standard was to permit employers to design systems to control asbestos. Imposing the new limits more rapidly would have encouraged employers to comply by simply rotating workers during an eight-hour work turn or providing protective breathing devices, government experts believed.

The Environmental Protection Agency last December banned open-air spraying of asbestos fireproofing and insulation and required industry to use filters to clean any gases produced in the mining, milling and manufacturing of materials containing asbestos.

Perilous Particles

Tiny Asbestos Fibers Pose a Health Threat To Workers and Public

Long Exposure Can Result In Lung Disease, Cancer; Industry Seeks Solutions

'The Bodies Are in the Street'

By HARRY NEWMAN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
NEW YORK—At Joseph Marino's gas station on the fringe of Manhattan's Spanish Harlem, the proven method of cleaning an old brake assembly goes like this: Pull off the wheel, aim an air hose at the exposed parts and blow the dust out.

A cloud of brown dust invariably flies right into the mechanic's face, says Mr. Marino. But it doesn't bother them. "We got masks and everything," Mr. Marino shrugs. "The guys don't use them. What the hell."

What the mechanics don't seem to know—like thousands of other mechanics—is that the brown dust is dangerous. Brake linings are made of asbestos. And if a mechanic breathes in enough dust from the worn-out linings it could eventually kill him.

The lethal quality of tiny, indestructible asbestos fibers that lodge in the lung is well known. Widely publicized studies by Dr. Irving Selikoff of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine lead him to predict that of the roughly 250,000 asbestos industry workers today, about 95,000 will die unnecessarily of occupational cancer. "In the next 10 to 15 years we will enter the asbestos cancer era," says Dr. Selikoff. "This is one of the great disasters of our time."

Hazards for Others, Too

The asbestos industry is well aware of the problem and is taking action to combat it, though critics say the steps aren't as drastic as the situation demands. But asbestos industry workers aren't the only ones who might fall prey to the lung cancers and other diseases caused by the mineral's irritating fibers. It's likely that millions of workers in other industries using asbestos fibers could be affected, as well as ordinary people who have come into contact with asbestos in the atmosphere.

Perhaps the most tragic fact is that for those who have already been sufficiently exposed, changes in procedures and standards of asbestos use—including a new set announced yesterday by the Department of Labor—are meaningless. It takes as many as 40 years after the first exposure for asbestos-related diseases to surface. Controls instituted now will indeed have an effect, but not for decades.

Harry Bailey is one man who isn't likely to find much solace in the new standards. Mr. Bailey isn't an asbestos worker. He's a bricklayer in a Mobil Oil Corp. refinery alongside the Delaware River in Paulsboro, N.J. He has been working at the plant for 33 years, and every year he has gone to the company medical department for a chest X-ray.

"They never said there was anything wrong with me," says 54-year-old Mr. Bailey, and indeed he has thus far developed no outward symptoms. But a few months ago he and 10 other workers from the refinery went to Mount Sinai for an examination, and every one of them proved to have scarred lungs—a sign of asbestosis, a nonmalignant lung disease. Mobil has refused to release his medical records to the New York doctors, Mr. Bailey says. The company declines to comment on the matter.

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