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ASBESTOS STANDARD OF 2 FIBERS RECOMMENDED:

J. W. ARMSTRONG

Workers should be exposed to an average of no more than 2 fibers of asbestos per eight-hour day, nor more than a peak concentration of ten fibers per day, both based on a minimum sampling time of 15 minutes.

That recommendation came from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in its criteria package for asbestos, submitted to the Labor Department and discussed by the five-member Advisory Committee on Asbestos Feb. 3.

Medical surveillance should be required for any exposure exceeding 1 fiber, NIOSH recommended. Such surveillance should include pulmonary function studies, medical histories, physical examinations (including x-rays, evidence of finger clubbing and other symptoms suggestive of early asbestosis).

Many other considerations were included in the 126-page criteria document. NIOSH recommends standards based on the health data, but it is up to the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration to decide whether to adopt them.

An emergency standard of 5 fibers was issued Dec. 7. Hearings on the proposed permanent standards begin March 14 in Washington's Departmental Auditorium.

Even before the NIOSH criteria package was submitted, however, an asbestos industry spokesman warned the Government that it could not rely on industry cooperation if a standard below 5 fibers was adopted.

Matt Swetonic of the Asbestos Information Association told a meeting of industry representatives and national trade associations convened by OSHA that industry could not support a level of 2 fibers and questioned whether medical evidence really supports lower standards. Dr. John Welsh, medical director of Union Carbide, said industry is finding it difficult to meet the emergency standard of 5 fibers and expressed the hope that it would go no lower. He also felt that fibers smaller than 1/2 micron should be considered in the standard-setting. Dr. Welsh also quoted Dr. Irving Selikoff of Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York as telling him that the original TLVs for asbestos were unfortunately unrealistic and consequently were never adhered to by the bulk of the industry.

A common theme of comments by industry at the meeting was that they were being excluded from the standard-setting process and wanted more input before the standards were set, not after.

The Asbestos Advisory Committee, which met Feb. 3 and will hold several other meetings on the proposed permanent standards before the hearings begin March 4, consists of:

Edwin C. Hyatt, Industrial Hygiene Group Leader, Los Alamos (N.M.) Scientific Lab, chairman; Jack Balitt, industrial hygienist, New York State Department of Labor; Dr. Joseph K. Wagoner, Director, Division of Field Study and Clinical Investigation, NIOSH, Cincinnati; Isaac Weaver, Director of Environmental Controls, Raybestos-Manhattan Corp., Mannheim, Pa.; Andy Haas, Safety Director, Asbestos Workers International Union, Washington, D.C.

GEORGIA COMPANY CONTINUES TO MANUFACTURE CARCINOGEN:

Beta-naphthylamine, a demonstrable carcinogen which has been known to cause bladder cancer in workers who handle it, is still being produced by the Augusta Chemical Co., Augusta, Ga., even though many states and other countries have long banned its manufacture.

The plant was recently visited by representatives of HEW's National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, acting on their own initiative on the basis of information supplied to them. The company is non-union, the 40 or so workers having twice rejected union representation in elections.