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State to Enact Asbestos Rules

BY PAMELA ZEKMAN

The Illinois department of labor recently announced stringent regulations on the construction industry to reduce the health hazard of asbestos—a substance used in fireproofing materials that is linked to cancer.

The regulations, similar to those enacted in New York last April, will become effective August 1. They are designed to reduce exposure to asbestos dust particles that circulate in the air or fall to the floor and stairwells when sprayed on girders, walls and ceilings.

The action was the result of medical studies, some dating back to 1964, which warned of the potential health hazard of inhaling asbestos and said exposure can lead to cancer and to asbestosis, a heart disease.

Announced at Meeting

The new regulations were announced by Nathan Willens, hygience supervisor, and Edward Stevenson, construction unit supervisor, of the labor department during a meeting with representatives of the construction industry.

Willens reported that after two months of research he concluded that "all medical evidence we can find says a potential hazard exists from inhaling this dust. We are taking these precautions as a safety measure."

He added that asbestos can be harmful to persons by as well as construction crews who breathe in the excess dust.

Requirements for Workmen

The new regulations require workmen to shower with exclusive use of respirators in an area being sprayed so that no particles can escape. This includes stairwells and elevator shafts.

Covers must also be placed over all objects in the immediate area and sprayers are required to wear coveralls and respirators.

Excess dust must be immediately vacuumed after work is completed and placed in a sealed container for disposal at an approved site. Warning signs must be placed at all entrances to the area while work is underway.

Deaths Linked to Asbestos

In announcing the rules Willens reported that 10 of the 35 deaths among members of the local asbestos workers union between January 1967 and June 30 may be linked to asbestos. Thirteen died of cancer and six of asbestosis.

"This is what caused my real concern," Willens said. "We are trying to protect workmen in Illinois from the hazards of working with this substance."

Willens cited one study that concluded, "inhalation of asbestos over a period of years can result in serious lung difficulties and can affect all people in the area where it is used."

He said another study, noted a "particular danger" for workmen who combine smoking with exposure to asbestos.

Slides of Sites Shown

"A workman who does both has 92 times more chance of getting lung cancer than one who does neither," Willens said.

During the meeting Stevenson showed slide photographs of "typical" construction sites in Chicago which depicted sloppy "housekeeping" by workmen.

The photographs showed dust straying outward from unenclosed areas, accumulating on floors, rails, stairways, and in elevator shafts.

Manufacturers of fireproofing material said two asbestos free products have been developed and others are being worked on.

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