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Reaction to Proposal for Rules On Asbestos Water Pipes Mixed

By KAY CAHILL

Newly proposed state regulations to guard against the release of asbestos fibers from water pipes into drinking water have met with a mixed reaction from the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, which petitioned the state to develop the regulations.

As the result of a Sept. 16 public hearing, Richard S. Woodhull, chief of the state Department of Health Services' water supplies division, revised the initially proposed regulations for monitoring the asbestos content of water running through asbestos-cement water pipes.

There are about 800 miles of asbestos-cement pipe being used in 80 Connecticut towns.

The major change proposed by Woodhull is requirement to tear up sections of pipe if acidity increases to a specific level. Acidity is a major factor in corrosion that leads to release of asbestos fibers into water.

The proposed regulations also require that water be chemically treated to eliminate the fibers if the exposed pipe is found to be corroding and if significant levels of asbestos are found in the water.

"That sounds reasonable," said Dan-

iel Millstone, litigation director of the Connecticut Fund for the Environment. But, he said, the regulations fail to consider what happens if chemical treatment of the water does not prevent the fibers from entering the water.

"That's a major omission," Millstone said.

Representatives of the pipe manufacturers could not be reached for comment Tuesday, but they have argued that the regulations are not needed because the pipes do not pose a health hazard. The General Assembly has banned the installation of asbestos-cement water pipe, but the manufacturers are challenging the ban.

Woodhull's revised version of the regulations stipulates that, if statistically significant levels of the fibers are found, all consumers who receive the affected water will be notified of test results and of control measures being taken. This is a provision sought by some environmentalists.

Millstone said he approved of that addition to the regulations, but said consumers should be notified if any asbestos is discovered rather than waiting for the level to become statistically significant.