

No. 307
March 30
1977

Exposure Threshold Set for Asbestos Medical Exam Requirement

Employee medical exams are required when employees are exposed to more than 0.1 fibers greater than five microns in length per cubic centimeter of air, Dr. Morton Corn informed Bell Laboratories January 19 as one of his last acts before leaving office. Bell requested an interpretation of the applicability of the asbestos standard to its office building, in which asbestos levels typically average 0.06 fibers per cubic centimeter of air, while levels in the ambient air in the vicinity of the buildings average 0.1 fibers per cc of air. The company noted that, if interpreted literally, the OSHA standard (§ 1910.1001) requires initiation of employee monitoring and medical surveillance when even a single fiber is found.

Corn's reply noted that asbestos may be expected in any work environment in which asbestos has been applied to walls, ceilings, exposed structural steel, air ducts, return air spaces, boilers or pipes, or when the workplace is adjacent to an asbestos-releasing industrial operation. He said that the standard requires initial monitoring and medical surveillance any time there is a reason to believe that asbestos may be present in the workplace, but continued monitoring after the initial determinations is required only if employee exposures exceed the permissible limit of two fibers greater than five microns in length per cubic centimeter of air as a time-weighted average.

The letter is at ¶ 10,830.

Suit Filed to Set Aside Ground Fault Protection Standards

The National Constructors Association filed a petition February 18 with the U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit charging that the ground fault protection standards adopted by OSHA on December 21 were not promulgated in accordance with the law, were not justified by the evidence of the record, and exceeded the Secretary's authority under the Act. The Association asked the Appeals Court to review the standard and set it aside. The petition is at ¶ 10,829. The standard, effective February 22, requires use of ground fault circuit interrupters on temporary wiring, or establishment of an equipment grounding conductor program.

Lead Researcher Charges OSHA Misused His Study

At the hearing on the proposed lead standard which began March 15, Great Britain's Dr. Michael D. Williams charged that his research was "used wrongly" by OSHA to justify its position that blood lead levels are related to air lead concentrations. Williams, who was retained as a consultant by the Lead Industries Association, Inc., said that recent studies, including his own, have shown that there is no clear correlation between air lead and blood lead levels. It is illogical to set an air lead standard, he said, and suggested that the standard be based on blood lead levels. He also noted that his research indicates that there are no material adverse health effects if blood lead levels do not exceed 80 ug/100gms, and LIA argued that this level should be set as the permissible limit for a solely biological standard.

EMPLOYMENT SAFETY AND HEALTH GUIDE, published weekly by Commerce Clearing House, Inc., 4025 W. Peterson Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60646. Subscription rate \$240 per year. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois. Issue No. 307, March 30, 1977. Printed in U. S. A. All rights reserved.

PLAINTIFF'S
EXHIBIT
AL-1051

ALCOA0000008448

The American Iron and Steel Institute joined LIA in recommending that the standard be based on biological, rather than environmental, levels and in contending that a permissible blood lead level of 80 ug/100gms was reasonable and would protect employees. It also pointed out that supplied-air helmets can reduce employee exposure far more than engineering controls—to less than 10 ug/m³ under even the most extreme conditions. Helmets have other advantages over engineering controls, according to LIA: they are cheaper, reduce noise exposures, increase comfort by cooling air, and give additional safety protection. AISI added that OSHA objections to respirators do not apply to supplied-air helmets; difficulties with proper fit and respiratory function are eliminated because the helmets are positive pressure devices which completely enclose the worker's head and neck.

The Battery Council International testified that the proposed standard's prohibition against recirculating air back into the workplace should be eliminated, because it is based on a no longer valid assumption that the air cannot be sufficiently cleaned. The technology now exists for a recirculation system that can remove virtually all the lead from air, while recovering nearly all the heat and energy otherwise wasted in moving air, BCI said.

The President's Council on Wage and Price Stability, created in 1974, criticized OSHA for not considering less costly alternatives such as rigid enforcement of the existing permissible limit of 200 ug/m³. The Council also urged OSHA not to require engineering controls.

HRG, Women's Groups, and UAW Call for Stricter Standard

Dr. Sidney Wolfe, Director of Public Citizens' Health Research Group (a Ralph Nader organization), testified that HRG data indicate that blood lead levels as low as 40-60 ug/100gms produced anemia in nearly 30 percent of people exposed. He also cited a study of lead battery workers in Rumania which showed that men with blood lead levels of 41 ug/100gms had decreased libido and significantly decreased ability to produce healthy sperm. Other studies cited by Wolfe showed that the maximum safe blood lead level for a fetus is 30-40 ug/100gms. He recommended that OSHA set a permissible blood lead level of 30 ug/100gms and that OSHA require employers to provide medical exams for the families of lead-exposed workers because of studies showing lead poisoning in these families.

Companies which require women to prove that they are sterile before they can be hired for lead-exposed jobs, or which transfer fertile women to lower paying, nonexposed jobs, were criticized by Camille Kozlowski of the National Organization for Women and Catherine East of the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year. They argued that if OSHA does not set a blood lead limit low enough to protect pregnant or potentially pregnant women without guaranteeing their right to work at lead-exposed jobs, employers will be given a justification for discriminatory practices.

The United Auto Workers also recommended that the standard provide for equal protection for men and women and stated that OSHA should promulgate a standard which would require that air lead exposure be limited to the point where lead absorption causes no significant increase in blood lead above pre-employment level, or 40 ug/100gms, whichever is less.

The comments are summarized at ¶ 10,836.