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OSHA Unveils Final Asbestos Rules; 4 Million Workers Covered By Standards

New federal standards to protect workers exposed to asbestos were unveiled with the head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration asserting that the action "greatly" enhances" protection afforded under previous rules.

"With these new rules, we now have in place a regulatory structure that will result in very significant reductions in deaths due to cancer from asbestos exposure and in costs to society," OSHA Administrator Joseph A. Dear said at a news conference to announce the new standards.

The standards, which lower the permissible exposure limit for all forms of asbestos from 0.2 fibers per cubic centimeter of air to 0.1 f/cc, require building owners to disclose the presence of asbestos in buildings,

> **"These new rules... will result in very significant reductions in deaths due to cancer from asbestos exposure and in costs to society."**
>
> — Joseph A. Dear, *OSHA Administrator*

and put in place a new worker protection scheme that attempts to link the most stringent controls with the most hazardous work operations.

The rules are designed to protect nearly 4 million workers in construction, general industry, and shipbuilding at a cost to employers of $361.4 million. According to Dear, that cost is significantly less than the estimated $15 billion price tag for a provision pushed by a number of labor unions that would have required building owners to conduct comprehensive inspections of their structures to locate asbestos.

Instead of requiring the comprehensive inspections, OSHA devised a strategy that presumes thermal system insulation and/or sprayed-on or troweled-on surfacing material contains asbestos in all buildings constructed before 1980 unless building owners can prove otherwise. Once the presumed asbestos-containing materials have been identified, a tiered set of worker protection requirements kicks in whenever employees are potentially exposed to those materials or other forms of in-place asbestos.

The most stringent controls, erection of negative-pressure enclosures, are required when workers are removing the high-risk asbestos-containing materials, and less stringent controls are required for other jobs involving work OSHA considers less risky, according to the agency. The rules also include enhanced training for workers and a provision that a so-called competent person oversee virtually all work around asbestos on construction sites. The standard for general industry is aimed primarily at brake and clutch repair operations and outlines acceptable control methods for those operations.

The rule takes effect October 11, although start-up for some specific provision will be phased in after that, according to OSHA.

Lynn Goldman, assistant administrator for prevention, pesticides, and toxic substances for the Environmental Protection Agency, told reporters that the rules are designed to prevent workers from unknowingly disturbing asbestos-containing materials in buildings. Goldman called that "the single biggest problem with asbestos in public buildings."

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Avoid that Burning, Corroding, Itching, Exploding, Nauseating

Video Helps Increase Safety Around Asbestos Abatement Projects

Because of extensive media coverage, asbestos can cause concern and rumors among those who must work near asbestos abatement projects. *What You Need to Know* tos, highlights the actions taken to prevent employee exposure during abatement; describes the methods used to identify, remove, or cover asbestos; examines warning signs,

