

ASBESTOS:

Some Answers

Tiny asbestos fibers inhaled by workers years ago have given rise to lung-related diseases and certain cancers. Now that the problem has been recognized, here are some answers and information on investigations.

IN JANUARY 1972 the *Target Health Hazard Program* was initiated by OSHA Administration "to promote the understanding of five hazardous workplace substances, so that more effective control measures might be taken to prevent the occupational diseases or poisoning associated with them." Asbestos was one of the substances singled out as a target health hazard; the others were cotton dust, carbon monoxide, lead, and silica.

In the ensuing seven years—continuing through several federal administrations—this educational program has continued. Enclosures, local exhaust ventilation, and dust respirators continue to be methods of affording protection in some operations. But since 1972, legislation has been enacted setting limits on the amount of air-borne asbestos fibers permitted in the work place.

The following questions and answers and the article, "Modern Substitutes for Ancient Asbestos" (see page 56) update this part of the original *Target Health Hazard Program*.

Two techniques recently developed in Britain will facilitate the assessment of air-borne asbestos fibers, more quickly and more accurately than by current manual counting methods. The rapid monitoring equipment can assess con-

ventional samples of air-borne asbestos dust at rates up to 30 per hour, giving digital readout direct in fibers per milliliter of air sam-

pled. The technique involves exposing the collected fibers to a magnetic field, while preparing the membrane filter for examina-



Workers at the Norfolk Shipbuilding & Drydock Corp. remove asbestos from pipe in a ship undergoing repairs. They are protected from possible exposure to asbestos fibers by wearing disposable coveralls and hoods made of Tyvek spun-bonded olefin material, as well as respirators, goggles, and rubber gloves. Arm and neck openings are taped closed. (Photo: Courtesy of DuPont Company).

EDITOR'S NOTE: Material for this article has been adapted from *Asbestos Exposure—What It Means; What to Do*, (DHEW Publication No. (NIH) 78-), and *Asbestos Exposure—A Desk Reference for Communicators*, (DHEW Publication No. (NIH) 78-1622). (See Bibliography).