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Pfizer

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH REPORT

CORPORATE SAFETY OFFICE
NO. 32

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FINAL ASBESTOS STANDARD ISSUED

An emergency standard limiting exposure of employees to asbestos dust was described in Pfizer Occupational Safety & Health Report No. 20 of February 15, 1972. A final standard (full text in appendix of this report) limiting employee exposure to asbestos dust to two fibers, not longer than five micrometers, per cubic centimeter of air on a time-weighted average, was announced on June 7 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and will become effective July 1, 1976.

The present permissible concentration of five fibers per cubic centimeter will remain in effect until July 1, 1976. In addition, the new standard prohibits any concentrations in excess of 10 fibers at any time.

The new standard takes effect July 7 of this year. The standard was adopted after consideration of recommendations from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the OSHA Advisory Committee on Asbestos Dust, and comments submitted by mail and during four days of public hearings.

Provisions

The primary means of compliance required are feasible technological controls and appropriate work practices, including rotation of employees. The use of personal protective equipment such as respirators to effect compliance was dismissed because of the burdensome and discomforting aspects of devices.

The following compliance requirements also are contained in the standard:

Hand tools that may produce or release asbestos fibers in excess of the limits must be equipped with local exhaust ventilation systems.

As much as possible, asbestos must be handled and worked in the wet state unless this reduces the usefulness of the product.

No asbestos cement, mortar, coating, grout, plaster, or similar material containing asbestos can be removed from shipping bags or other containers without either being wetted, enclosed, or ventilated.

Where respirators are permitted, they must be selected from among the types approved by the Bureau of Mines or NIOSH, but no employee may be assigned to a task requiring a respirator if a physician determines it would affect his job functioning or health.

14

The employer must provide and require the use of special protective clothing, change rooms, and two separate lockers from the employee's street and work clothes and exercise care in laundering and any other handling of contaminated clothing.

External work areas must be kept free of excessive accumulations of asbestos fibers and waste must be collected in sealed, impermeable bags or other such containers.

Other Requirements

Under the standard employers are required to establish monitoring systems to assure that employee exposure is below the limits. Monitoring must be done at least every six months and employees or their representatives are guaranteed the right to observe the measurements and have access to records of them.

Warning signs are provided for where asbestos concentrations may exceed the limits. Labels warning of possible adverse health effects must be affixed to all raw materials, mixtures, scrap, waste, debris or other product containing asbestos fibers, or to their containers. No label is required where the fibers have been modified by a bonding agent, binder or other coating that prevents release of above-limit concentrations.

Records of personal or environmental monitoring must be maintained by the employer for at least three years and be available upon request to OSHA or NIOSH. Any former or current employees are guaranteed reasonable access to records of their personal exposure to airborne asbestos. Employees found to have been exposed to excessive concentrations must be informed within five days after the findings and told what corrective actions are being taken.

Employers must provide, or make available at their cost, comprehensive medical examinations including chest X-ray and pulmonary tests within 30 days of an employee's first employment in a job involving asbestos exposure and within 30 days before or after termination of a worker's employment. By January 31, 1973, employers must make available annual medical examinations for employees in asbestos exposure areas.

Records of medical examinations made under the standard must be maintained for 20 years and must be open to inspection and copying by the Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, the director of NIOSH, authorized physicians or medical consultants of either agency, and, upon request of an employee or former employee, to his physician. Doctors who conduct examinations under the standard must furnish the employer with all information required by the regulation and any other medical data related to occupational exposure to asbestos fibers.

In addition to manufacturing and other industries, the standard covers workers in construction, ship repairing, shipbuilding, shipbreaking, and longshoring.

References

BNA (OSHR) Volume 2, No. 2, June 15, 1972 page 19
Job Safety & Health Report No. 13, Volume 2 page 121
37FR, February 18, 1972 page 3645
Occupational Exposure to Asbestos, HEW-NIOSH - HSM72-10267
Asbestos Air Pollution Control, Illinois Institute for Environmental Quality, National Technical Information Service PB205-208

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16

June 22, 1972