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ENVIRONMENTALISTS WIN BAN ON WALL PATCHING COMPOUNDS CONTAINING ASBESTOS

Today the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) acted to grant a petition filed last July by the Natural Resources Defense Council and Consumers Union. The petition requested the Commission to ban the sale of drywall spackle, joint, and taping compounds containing cancer-causing asbestos.

In a letter yesterday to the CPSC NRDC requested that the CPSC declare that these patching compounds create an "imminent hazard" to the public health. This declaration would result in the immediate recall of these products while the Commission proceeds with the rulemaking on the final ban. If the CPSC were to grant this request, consumers who had purchased patching compounds containing asbestos could return them and get a refund from their hardware store or other retail outlet. Retailers would then return these products to the manufacturer for a refund.

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The NRDC letter and petition cited evidence that even very brief low-level exposures to asbestos, such as from a single use of a asbestos-containing patching compound, will expose the consumer to an increased risk of cancer. Asbestos inhalation causes lung cancer and the always fatal mesothelioma. Mesothelioma is a cancer of the linings of the lungs and stomach.

"Asbestos is not an essential ingredient in wall patching compounds. These products should be recalled and removed from the retailers' shelves before more consumers are unnecessarily exposed to the cancer-causing asbestos," said Ruby Compton, Attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

At the time the petition was filed, NRDC also asked the Commission to review other consumer products for asbestos content and ban those products which present a significant health risk. In its letter yesterday, NRDC repeated their request, citing specific other asbestos-containing products which should receive immediate action: children's modeling clay; paints; wallboards and panels; asbestos floor tile, backings, and adhesives; asbestos cement powders; pure asbestos dust; and brake linings and shoes. NRDC suggested that the Commission identify all corporations which use asbestos in their products, and request from them information on the name, quantity, amount of asbestos used, end use, and distribution of all such products. This information would be used to determine which additional consumer products containing asbestos should be banned.