

CHANGING REQUIREMENTS UNDER OSHA

by

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As of today, the law concerning concentrations of asbestos in the air in workplaces is that which is stated in the emergency standard which was promulgated by the Department of Labor on December 7, 1971. That publication in the Federal Register was followed soon afterwards, according to the legal requirements, by a statement from the Secretary of Labor proposing to establish a permanent rule. Both of those statements are very similar. In the rule-making procedure, there is opportunity for differences of opinion to be heard and it was in connection with that procedure that the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health prepared their Criteria Document and proposed a standard different from the emergency standard. Their standard and the emergency standard, although they differ in the numbers, do have a lot in common. They also have some startling differences. The emergency standard states not only the concentrations that are allowable but goes on to discuss methods of compliance and to lay down some rules. The statement of concentrations is rather brief. It simply says, "The eight-hour time-weighted average airborne concentration of asbestos dust to which employees are exposed shall not exceed 5 fibers/ml greater than 5 microns in length as determined by the membrane filter method at 400-450 X magnification (4 mm objective), phase contrast illumination. Concentrations above 5 fibers/ml but not to exceed 10 fibers/ml may be permitted up to a total of 15 minutes in an hour for up to 5 hours in an eight-hour day." They have followed that