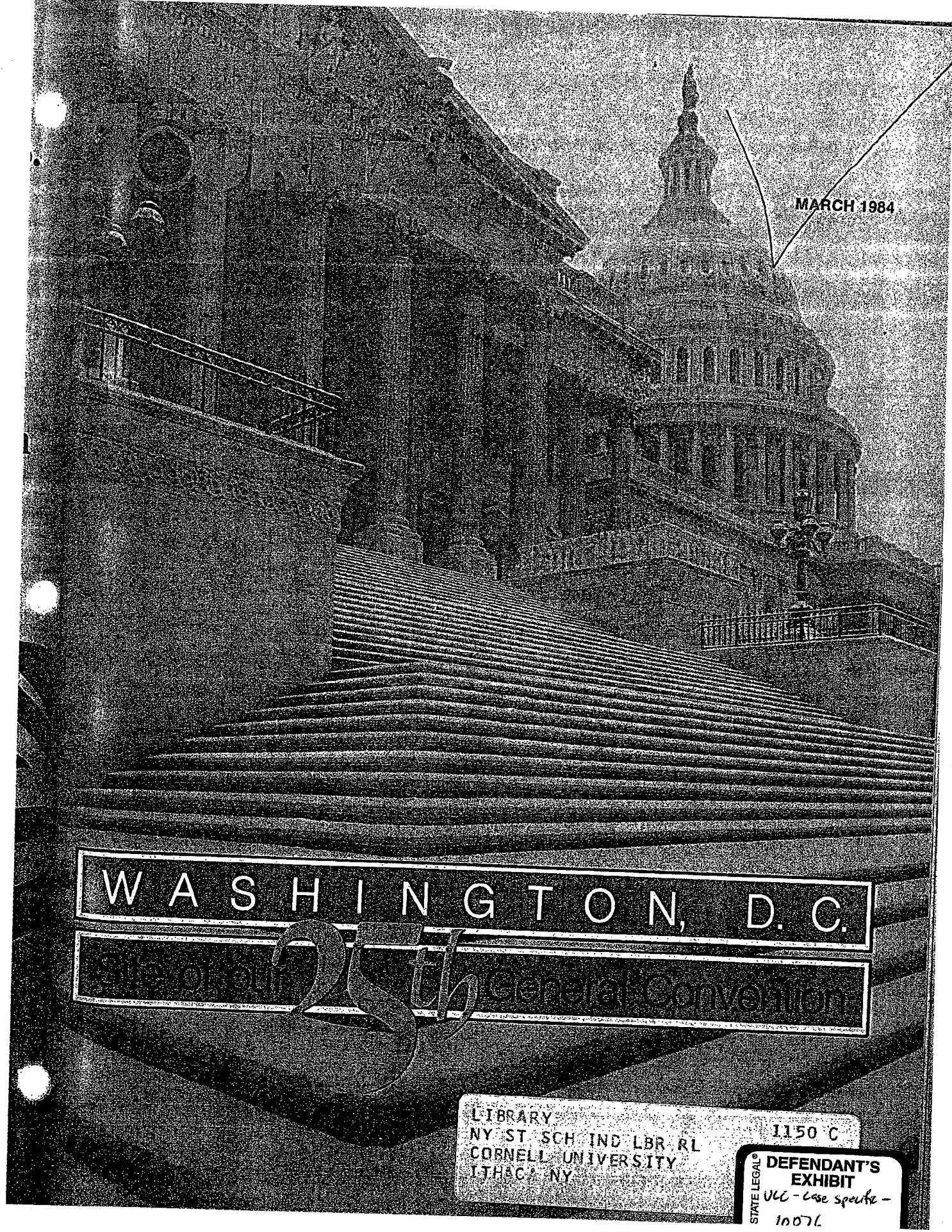


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Your Health and Safety

Substitution: The Best Protection from Asbestos

The IBPAT/OSH health and safety training program shows members four ways to protect from harmful substances. Substituting a safer product is the best protection and always the first choice. The other three are engineering controls, administrative procedures and personal protective equipment. Unfortunately, many manufacturers, distributors and contractors do not always substitute the safest materials.

Asbestos-free Tile Flooring

Now one manufacturer has set an example for industry by substituting other materials for asbestos to protect worker and consumer health. Tarkett Incorporated, a leading manufacturer of vinyl flooring, is currently the only U.S. tile flooring manufacturer whose entire product line is asbestos-free. The U.S. Tarkett is owned by a Swedish parent company, from which the extreme sensitivity to the asbestos health problem comes. Asbestos is banned in Sweden. In the United States, the floor industry alone uses 25 percent of all asbestos.

Asbestos has been a major material in floor covering products for more than 50 years. There are millions of square feet of asbestos-containing vinyl floor tile and sheet vinyl flooring in schools, hospitals, businesses, offices and homes.

Tarkett states: "The industry cannot undo the past but certainly can direct its future. We see asbestos-free flooring as the flooring of the future... and the future is now."

Asbestos Exposure

Asbestos fibers are released during installation or removal of asbestos-containing resilient floor covering. When floor tiles are sanded or cut to fit into place or if backing on sheet vinyl floorings is dry-scraped or sand-

ed, asbestos can be released. Asbestos can also be released when floor tiles are severely worn or damaged.

Airborne asbestos fibers are invisible to the human eye. But once inhaled, they are likely to become lodged in human tissue for years. After a certain amount of time, cancer may develop.

Worker and Consumer Awareness

In addition to its own concerns about health, Tarkett considered the attitudes of workers and consumers. Asbestos, the mineral that industry once considered "miraculous," has become the center of controversial publicity due to the extremely high rates of lung diseases and cancers in asbestos-exposed workers and their families.

Tarkett paid special attention to an independent consumer research survey on asbestos by R. H. Bruskin Associates in September 1982. Three out of four respondents preferred vinyl flooring *without asbestos*. Over 82 percent of survey respondents saw asbestos as a possible threat to their health.

Removing Old Tile

Tarkett provides advice to schools, hospitals and others who plan to remove asbestos-containing flooring. Tarkett recommends the Resilient Floor Covering Institute's pamphlet, *Safe Work Procedures for Resilient Floor Coverings*, which gives detailed precautions for removal of asbestos-containing sheet vinyl flooring and vinyl floor tiles.

Tarkett's aggressive action against the asbestos hazard should serve as a model for industry. Tarkett has made workers' health a top priority. Tarkett is one company not willing to wait while asbestos-related cancers and diseases continue to claim more victims.

When removing and replacing asbestos-containing flooring, never sand an existing tile installation. Never dry-scrape adhered areas of floor covering. Never dry sweep. If dry sweeping is unavoidable, use water or another suppressant.

When working with asbestos, follow OSHA regulations. Always enclose the area with plastic barriers. Wet the material first. Wet fibers will not float in the air as easily as dry fibers. Wet fibers are also easier to clean up by carefully lifting and placing them into heavy plastic bags which are disposed of at a suitable hazardous waste dumping site. A respirator rated for toxic dusts should be worn for every procedure.

BCTD Submits Asbestos Standard

The AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department recently submitted to OSHA an asbestos standard for the construction industry. If promulgated, it will be the first health standard ever to apply to construction. Presently, general industry health standards do not cover construction resulting in lack of protection for many IBPAT members. Many requirements of OSHA's general industry health standards are not feasible for contractors. A separate set of health standards for construction is needed.

The BCTD's Safety and Health Committee undertook drafting the highly technical asbestos standard through a subcommittee appointed last May by Chairman Robert E. P. Cooney of the Ironworkers International. Key researchers were IBPAT Health and Safety Director Rod Wofford, John Barnhart of the Roofers International and Scott Schneider of the Carpenters and Joiners.

The BCTD's standard was released the same week as OSHA's Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) for asbestos. In the ETS, construction is not addressed except in the lowering of the Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) to 0.5 fibers/c.c., which applies to all SIC codes. (A "0.5 fibers/c.c." PEL allows an average worker to breathe 500,000 fibers of asbestos with each breath in an 8-hour day and still be within OSHA's "safe" exposure limit!)

The BCTD-proposed standard requests that the PEL be reduced to 0.1 fiber/c.c. (100,000 fibers per cubic meter of air)—the lowest possible detectable level with currently available technology. OSHA will consider the proposed reduction of PEL during upcoming hearings and comment.

The BCTD asbestos standard includes several unique subsections that are necessary due to the nature of the construction industry. There is an explicit section on employee training and certification which includes provisions for respirator and competency examinations.

One innovative subsection classifies asbestos products and work processes into one of three categories based on air monitoring results. Category A products or processes allow no release of asbestos fibers and have few requirements. At the other extreme, Category C products or processes allow fibers above the PEL and have strict