CARCINOGENS IN THE WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION

At the October 1979 joint meeting of the Engineering and Research and Manufacturing and Supply Subcommittees, a report on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Policy for Regulating Workplace Carcinogens was presented by Personnel and Organization Staff. This report noted that final regulations for carcinogens in the workplace were anticipated by the end of 1979. It was agreed that efforts to eliminate the use of potential carcinogens where possible should be preceded by analysis of the affected materials and processes. In this regard, a Task Force was established by the Subcommittees to identify carcinogens and quantities in use, set targets for elimination ahead of regulation, take steps to find substitutes, develop a directive and workplan and organize to identify and control potentially carcinogenic substances.

Since October, OSHA has released its Policy which establishes criteria and procedures for the identification, classification and regulation of potential carcinogens in the workplace. The Policy further defines Category I potential carcinogens as substances known to be carcinogenic in humans or which have been demonstrated to be carcinogenic in two separate laboratory animal studies. Category II substances are those where data are suggestive of carcinogenicity in humans and test animals. The Policy also outlines criteria for classifying a substance into Categories I or II and establishes the mechanism for issuance of standards governing use of a particular substance. No specific substances were categorized, or standards promulgated, with the issuance of the Policy. Normally, once the need for a standard is determined by OSHA, it could take one to two years before the standard is issued. If an "Emergency Standard" is set, the ruling is issued and immediate compliance is required. A number of court challenges of the new Policy are expected to center primarily on stringent rules virtually precluding use of negative evidence studies when defining the carcinogenicity of a substance and cost/benefit criteria. A draft list of candidate substances governed by the Policy was issued by OSHA two years ago. A revised list is expected to be released in July, 1980 followed by a prioritized extract in September.

The Task Force has concentrated on developing the capability for managing the elimination or control of Category I potential carcinogens in the workplace. A start has been made in identifying specific applications for subsequent elimination or control of asbestos, hexavalent chromium compounds and benzene.

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