RFP states quantity of asbestos being imported in U.S. is increasing, and coupled with increasing world consumption, may lead to a critical shortage of asbestos. Interest in research to produce a substitute fiber from abundant low-cost raw materials is consistent with the Bureau's program to minimize mineral and metal needs, according to RFP.

EPA's recent RFP proposes to investigate association between ambient exposure to asbestos and mortality from respiratory cancer, mesothelioma, and cardiovascular diseases. Site of intended study is Calaveras, Fresno and San Benito counties, California. Contract will require completion of work within six months of award date.

OSHA Head Speaks To Risk Assessment and Risk Benefit

In a July 24 speech to an American Association for the Advancement of Science forum on risk assessment in Washington, D.C., Dr. Eula Bingham, Assistant Secretary of Labor (OSHA), said personal risk assessment has been "sometimes promoted" as an alternative to social regulation, but social regulation is needed in the area of worker safety and health. She stated OSHA does use risk assessment techniques in developing and enforcing standards, but that "the agency maintains that the use of risk benefit analysis requires considerable caution."

Dr. Bingham asserted that decisionmakers want their actions based on as much information and analysis as possible, but she added "there are a number of obvious difficulties with attempts to rely uncritically on any form of risk benefit analysis." Such difficulties include the fact that often different groups, sometimes later generations, are at risk from not regulating than those benefiting temporarily from non-regulation, she explained.

Another problem, Bingham said, is placing a value on risk. "What does worth mean in terms of pain, suffering and family dislocation?", she asked. Dr. Bingham listed four ways by which OSHA considers the financial and health impact of a regulation:

- Carefully assesses the health and safety risks of the workplace
- Evaluates the costs of alternative strategies
- Endeavors to select the most cost effective method of complying with its standards
- Considers timing of implementation of standards.

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