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U.S. Department of Labor
Program Highlights
Fact Sheet No. OSHA 92-06

BETTER PROTECTION AGAINST ASBESTOS IN THE WORKPLACE

What Is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a widely used, mineral-based material that is resistant to heat and corrosive chemicals. Typically, asbestos appears as a whitish, fibrous material which may release fibers that range in texture from coarse to silky; however, airborne fibers that can cause health damage may be too small to see with the naked eye.

Who Is Exposed?

An estimated 1.3 million employees in construction and general industry face significant asbestos exposure on the job. Heaviest exposures occur in the construction industry, particularly during the removal of asbestos during renovation or demolition. Employees are also likely to be exposed during the manufacture of asbestos products (such as textiles, friction products, insulation, and other building materials) and during automotive brake and clutch repair work.

What Are the Dangers of Asbestos Exposure?

Exposure to asbestos can cause asbestosis (scarring of the lungs resulting in loss of lung function that often progresses to disability and to death); mesothelioma (cancer affecting the membranes lining the lungs and abdomen); lung cancer; and cancers of the esophagus, stomach, colon, and rectum.

What Protections Are Mandatory?

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued revised regulations covering asbestos exposure in general industry and construction. Both standards set a maximum exposure limit and include provisions for engineering controls and respirators, protective clothing, exposure monitoring, hygiene facilities and practices, warning signs, labeling, recordkeeping, and medical exams.

Nonasbestiform tremolite, anthophyllite, and actinolite were excluded from coverage under the asbestos standard in May 1992.

Here are some of the highlights of the revised rules, published in the Federal Register June 20, 1986; and on Sept. 14, 1988:

- **Permissible Exposure Limit:** In both general industry and construction, workplace exposure must be limited to 0.2 fibers per cubic centimeter of air (0.2 f/cc), averaged over an eight-hour work shift. The excursion or short-term limit is one fiber per cubic centimeter of air (1 f/cc) averaged

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In construction, there are special regulated-area requirements for asbestos removal, renovation, and demolition operations. These provisions include a negative pressure area, decontamination procedures for workers, and a "competent person" with the authority to identify and control asbestos hazards. The standard includes an exemption from the negative pressure enclosure requirements for certain small scale, short duration operations provided special work practices prescribed in an appendix to the standard are

followed.

Hygiene Facilities and Practices: Clean change rooms must be furnished by employers for employees who work in areas where exposure is above the TWA and/or excursion limit. Two lockers or storage facilities must be furnished and separated to prevent contamination of the employee's street clothes from protective work clothing and equipment. Showers must be furnished so that employees may shower at the end of the work shift. Employees must enter and exit the regulated area through the decontamination area.

The equipment room must be supplied with impermeable, labeled bags and containers for the containment and disposal of contaminated protective clothing and equipment.

Lunchroom facilities for those employees must have a positive pressure, filtered air supply and be readily accessible to employees. Employees must wash their hands and face prior to eating, drinking or smoking. The employer must ensure that employees do not enter lunchroom facilities with protective work clothing or equipment unless surface fibers have been removed from the clothing or equipment.

Employees may not smoke in work areas where they are occupationally exposed to asbestos.

Medical Exams: *In general industry*, exposed employees must have a preplacement physical examination before being assigned to an occupation exposed to airborne concentrations of asbestos at or above the action level or the excursion level. The physical examination must include chest X-ray, medical and work history, and pulmonary function tests. Subsequent exams must be given annually and upon termination of employment, though chest X-rays are required annually only for older workers whose first asbestos exposure occurred more than 10 years ago.

In construction, examinations must be made available annually for workers exposed above the action level or excursion limit for 30 or more days per year or who are required to wear negative pressure respirators; chest X-rays are at the discretion of the physician.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Copies of the general industry asbestos standard Part II, Health Standards, Stock Number 869-017-00110-4, \$16.00) and the construction industry standard (Stock Number 869-017-00112-1, \$14.00) are available from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9325, or telephone 202-783-3238. These standards are also available on CD-ROM (Stock Number 729-013-00000-5, \$88.00) by subscription for four updates per year or a single disk for \$28.00.

Two pamphlets summarizing the rule are also available: (in single copies) "Asbestos Standard for General Industry" and "Asbestos Standard for Construction Industry," and can be obtained by sending a self-addressed mailing label to the OSHA Publications Office, Room N-3101, Washington, D.C. 20210, telephone 202-219-4667 or from any local OSHA office.

Questions about the standards can be answered by any local OSHA office or by OSHA regional offices located in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Kansas City, Denver, San Francisco, and Seattle.

All local OSHA offices have available for loan slide programs on the general industry and construction asbestos standards. Training on asbestos and other safety and health hazards is conducted at the OSHA

- Training Institute, 1555 Times Dr., Des Plaines, IL 60018, telephone 708-297-4810; tuition is charged.

This is one of a series of fact sheets highlighting U.S. Department of Labor programs. It is intended as a general description only and does not carry the force of legal opinion. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 219-8151. TDD message referral phone: 1-800-326-2577.



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