RECOMMENDED SAFE PRACTICES MINERAL DATA SHEET NO. 2

ASBESTOS

HAZARD CLASSIFICATION DUST - VERY HARMFUL - May cause asbestosis.

GENERAL Asbestos is a fibrous mixture of various silicates, mainly the hydrated silicate of magnesium with additional quantities of iron, aluminum, sodium, potassium and calcium. The fibrous characteristic, rather than the chemical composition, is responsible for the harmful tissue changes in the lungs. Industrial asbestos is chiefly derived from Canada, Italy and the Transvaal.

Asbestos is used in a variety of products. The long fibres are used in the textile industry for the manufacture of cloth, braid, rope, theatre curtains, etc. The shorter fibres together with an agglomerating agent are used in the manufacture of felt, paper, cardboard, varnishes, covering agents, cements, and rubber tires.

HARMFUL EFFECTS May cause asbestosis, a disease of the lungs in which the affected lung tissue becomes partially collapsed and fibrotic. The unaffected lung tissue tends to become dilated and emphysematous. The signs and symptoms are cough, expectoration, shortness of breath, weight loss, and easy fatigability. Occasionally, asbestos corns may occur in the skin of the hands caused by penetration of asbestos fibers into the layers of the skin. It takes five to ten years for asbestosis to develop. Death, in these cases, is usually the result of infection of the lungs, such as tuberculosis, or from congestive heart sease.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE CONCENTRATION For continuous exposure to respirable dust the maximum alloweble concentration is 5 million particles of asbestos dust per cubic foot of air.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES The asbestos dust should be controlled at the point of origin by use of local exhaust systems or wet methods. The operation dispersing the dust should be isolated or enclosed, or the operation so changed as to eliminate the dispersion of the dust. Approved dust type respirators are recommended only as a last resort.

MEDICAL CONTROL Pre-employment physical examintion including an X-ray of the chest should be required of all employees where exposure to excessive dust will be encountered.

Individuals with a history of tuberculosis should not be placed in a dusty atmosphere. Periodic physical examinations including chest X-rays should be required at least annually of all persons employed in dusty asbestos operations.

MASS. DEPT. OF LABOR & INDUSTRIES
DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENE

February, 1949

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