

IAQ issues retain top federal priority

OSHA, EPA and NIOSH are actively involved in numerous IAQ-related projects

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As a first step in formulating a national workplace standard on exposure to indoor air pollutants, the U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) has published a request for comments and information on issues pertinent to indoor air quality in occupational environments.

The issues on which comments were requested specifically included the definition of and health effects attributable to poor indoor air quality; ventilation systems performance; protocols for assessing IAQ; mitigation methods; building maintenance programs; and the potential contents of any regulation.

The scope of the request is "extensive," one government official told the ASHRAE Washington office recently. Therefore, the process of review is likely to take a considerable amount of time before any substantive steps are taken by OSHA.

ASHRAE submitted various "off-the-shelf" documents, including *ASHRAE Standard 62-1989* and the Society's Board approved position paper on indoor air quality to OSHA.

Appeals court voids asbestos ban

A federal appeals court struck down the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) phaseout and ban on products containing asbestos on grounds that, during the rule-making process, the agency rejected alternatives that were less burdensome to industry.

For example, the court estimated that the EPA ban would cost \$800 million in lost business and consumer costs of replacements. The court noted that the proposed asbestos ban could spare three lives over the next 13 years at costs to society as high as \$227 million (or \$76 million per life). Other issues that affected the court's decision included concerns over the safety of substitutes.

After 10 years of study and negotiation, EPA promulgated regulations prohibiting the manufacture of most asbestos-containing products on July 12, 1989. Almost immediately, several trade groups filed suit to overturn the ban.

The court decision places EPA's "chemical by chemical" regulatory approach in jeopardy, according to agency officials and environmentalists familiar with the issue. However, the court did not reject EPA's use of the Toxic Substance Control Act, which authorizes the agency to ban chemicals that pose unreasonable risks.

In other court-related actions, the national anti-smoking group Action on Smoking and Health's petition to compel OSHA to regulate smoking in the workplace was denied by a federal appeals court in late January.

Asbestos survey findings mixed

While reporting that office workers and general occupants of well-maintained buildings are at little risk from exposure to asbestos, a Congressionally mandated study also recently concluded that removal and abatement workers (as well as janitorial and custodial personnel) are often exposed to dangerous levels of asbestos contamination.

The study, released in late September, was conducted by the private, nonprofit Health Effects Institute-Asbestos Research (HEI-AR). Its intent was to review and summarize existing knowledge of asbestos in public and commercial buildings as a preliminary step to federal regulation.

The HEI-AR findings conclude more than seven years of medical and scientific analysis of asbestos in buildings. The report concludes that, "there does not appear to be sufficient justification on grounds of risk to the health of general occupants for arbitrarily removing intact asbestos-containing materials."

The HEI-AR review is one of the conditions needed before EPA would consider regulating asbestos in public buildings. In December, EPA announced plans to develop regulations modeled after the OSHA rule for commercial buildings.

IAQ guide for owners/managers

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety released a self-help guide to assist building owners and facility managers in preventing indoor air quality problems.

The 229-page guide, *Building Air Quality: A Guide for Building Owners and Facility Managers*, provides practical advice on:

- Developing a building profile and management plan to prevent indoor air problems;
- Tracking occupant complaints and gathering information on possible causes of indoor air problems;
- Investigating heating, ventilating and cooling systems to determine if they are properly operated and maintained;
- Identifying pollutant sources that may be causing problems; and
- Selecting appropriate outside technical services when needed.

EPA anticipates that the guide will also be useful to operations and maintenance staff, health and safety personnel and IAQ professionals.

Building Air Quality: A Guide for Building Owners and Facility Managers (stock number 055-000-00390-4) is available for \$24 from the U.S. Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954. To order by phone, call (202) 783-3238. ■