

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Response to ‘Exposure science will not increase protection of workers from asbestos-caused diseases: NIOSH fails to provide needed public health action and leadership’

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We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the concerns expressed by the authors of the letter. As they correctly point out, in 1976 NIOSH stated “...only a ban can assure protection against carcinogenic effects of asbestos...”. NIOSH’s position has not changed. However, if a ban were enacted immediately, millions of workers in the United States would continue to have potential exposure to asbestos minerals for many years to come because of the vast amounts of asbestos remaining in buildings, brakes and other locations. A ban would not prevent these occupational exposures. Also, these exposures are often qualitatively different than the types of exposures on which current exposure limits are based. By continuing to study asbestos exposures, and with a more thorough understanding of the particle characteristics that produce toxicity, better protections can be provided to workers who continue to be exposed and will be exposed in the future. For example, the current recommendations were established at the limit of quantification of the analytical method that has a large residual risk for cancer associated with it. Additional research may allow us to reduce the limit of quantification and the recommended exposure limit, and thus the risk of cancer for workers. A more fundamental understanding of the characteristics of asbestos particles and other elongate mineral particles that

could result if research within the framework proposed in the Roadmap (NIOSH, 2010) is conducted may inform on the potential toxicity of other elongate particles, such as carbon nanotubes (Poland et al., 2008), before they are introduced into widespread use in the work and general environment.

Thus, we believe that our article and the Roadmap (NIOSH, 2010) on which it is based do not represent “a giant leap backward” as suggested by the authors of the letter. Rather, we promote a more thorough understanding of asbestos exposures, which can lead to better protections for workers. We encourage the authors of the letter to join us in our efforts to provide more effective protections for workers who are, and will be, exposed to asbestos whether a ban is enacted or not.

References

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