

Agency pulls back on plans to rewrite asbestos ban

WASHINGTON>> The Trump administration is dropping plans to allow continued use of the last type of asbestos legally allowed in U.S. manufacturing after an outcry from asbestos opponents.

The Environmental Protection Agency said in a court filing Monday that it will now defend the Biden administration's ban of chrysotile asbestos, which is used in products like brake blocks and sheet gaskets.

The carcinogenic chemical has been mostly phased out in the U.S., but last year, the agency under former President Joe Biden sought to finish the decades-long fight with a comprehensive ban. The EPA in 2024 said "exposure to asbestos is known to cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, ovarian cancer, and laryngeal cancer, and it is linked to more than 40,000 deaths in the U.S. each year."

The EPA had said in a federal appeals court filing last month that parts of the ban may have gone "beyond what is necessary to eliminate the unreasonable risk" and that other options such as requiring workplace protection measures might eliminate that risk. The agency said it planned a roughly 30-month process to write new rules.

But industry associations have already filed suit against the Biden administration's ban. So has the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization, which fights asbestos-related diseases and believes the ban isn't as airtight as it needs to be. The nonprofit opposed pausing the case so the EPA could revisit the rule, arguing that any new proposal would likely be met by lawsuits, too.

All the work that's gone into the current litigation shouldn't be wasted, the nonprofit said. And a pause would also mean a delay in the rule's implementation.

Lynn Ann Dekleva, the agency's deputy assistant administrator of the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, said in a Monday filing that the EPA won't go through a process to rewrite the rule.

The EPA now says the Biden administration "failed to adequately protect chemical industry workers from health risks posed by chrysotile asbestos."

"To remedy the previous Administration's approach, we notified the court that we intend to reconsider the applicability of interim workplace protection requirements during the replacement of asbestos gaskets for all workers," EPA Press Secretary Brigit Hirsch said in a statement.

Linda Reinstein, president and CEO of the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization, said she was elated the EPA isn't going to reconsider the Biden administration's ban. She speculated that the EPA didn't like public reaction to its position.

— The Associated Press