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NIOSH Plans to Update Respirator Certification, Promising More Options for Worker Protection

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On Tuesday, May 24, 1994, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) published its proposed rule on respiratory protective devices that includes changes in the current procedures for testing and certifying air-purifying respirators used for tuberculosis (TB) control (*Federal Register* 59;May 24, 1994:26850-26889). The proposed certification procedures will include a new generation of respirators called "Class C" respirators, which test and certify the ability of the respirator to filter 95% of 0.3-micron size particles.

Currently, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires the use of a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) respirator for

worker protection because there have been no authorized NIOSH certification procedures to evaluate the efficacy of any other type of respirator to filter particles the size of the TB droplet nuclei, that is, as small as 1 micron.

NIOSH says that these new testing and certification procedures will enable manufacturers to produce a broader range of more practical and economic respirators that meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) performance criteria for respiratory protection devices for TB protection (including the ability to filter >95% of 1-micron size particles.) Although the new Class C model respirator would exceed slightly the CDC's performance criteria, it is anticipated that it will be priced more economically than the more stringent HEPA respirator.

These new NIOSH regulations will

be placed on an accelerated schedule and should result in a final rule by the end of this year. A broader range of certified respirators should be available by early 1995.

These proposed rules for new certification procedures do not change any of the current fit testing and fit checking requirements outlined in the respiratory protection standard 29 CFR;1910.134.

A public hearing was held on June 23-24, 1994, in Washington, DC. NIOSH also has requested written comments. These comments should be submitted no later than July 22, 1994, in triplicate to NIOSH Docket Office, Robert A. Taft Laboratories, Mailstop C-34,4676 Columbia Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45226. For a copy of the proposed regulations, call (800) 35-NIOSH.