Dear Dr. Tepper:

This letter follows a conference call held on July 5, 2012, between myself and Frank Hearl, Chief of Staff, Office of the Director, NIOSH, and other NIOSH staff members. OSHA requests assistance in assessing the evidence of beryllium sensitization and chronic beryllium disease among workers involved in abrasive blasting operations that have used coal or copper slag abrasives, which typically contain only trace amounts of toxic metals, including beryllium.

Abrasive blasting operations in shipyards, including those of the U.S. Navy, have used coal and copper slag abrasives for decades, since they first began to be substituted for sand-based abrasives. The sand abrasives commonly used in years past were highly hazardous because they produced exposures to crystalline silica and caused many cases of silicosis among blast workers. The potential exposures to beryllium and other metals among blast workers using coal and copper slag abrasives have long-been known, at least since the mid-1990s. More recent studies have also indicated potential exposures to beryllium in these workers. However, OSHA has not found evidence as to whether abrasive blasting workers exposed to coal and copper slags have actually developed beryllium sensitization and/or chronic beryllium disease.

Commercially produced abrasive grits from coal or copper slags, manufactured for the abrasive blasting industry, include such products as, Black Beauty®, Black Blast®, Kleen Blast®, and Sharpshot®, among others.

1 CDC Alert, Preventing Silicosis and Deaths from Sandblasting, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Publication Number 92-102, August 1992.


In 2003, the U.S. Navy provided OSHA with information on their abrasive blasting operations, in response to OSHA's pre-rule request for information on occupational exposures to beryllium (67 Fed. Reg. 70707-70712, November 26, 2002).

Earlier this year, we informally contacted the U.S. Navy (Ms. Joy Erdman in the Naval Safety Center Liaison Office, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations) to see if they would investigate evidence of beryllium sensitization or chronic beryllium disease in abrasive blast workers at one or more naval shipyards, with the possible assistance of NIOSH. The Navy's initial response was positive, but potential costs were a concern.

Please let us know if you will assist with such an investigation. Our points of contact include Dionne Williams, OSHA Office of Health Enforcement, (202) 693-2190, Maureen Ruskin, OSHA Office of Chemical Hazards – Metals (202) 693-2093, and Dr. Minda Nieblas, OSHA Office of Occupational Medicine, (202) 693-2323.

Sincerely,

Thomas Galassi, Director
Directorate of Enforcement Programs

cc: Frank Hearl, PE
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[5 Navy Response to OSHA’s Occupational Exposure to Beryllium - Request for Information, OSHA-H005C-2006-0870-0144; Attachment (1) - Navy Occupational Exposure Database (NOED) Query Report Personal Breathing Zone Air Sampling Results for Beryllium, OSHA-H005C-2006-0870-0145; Attachment (2) - Why the Navy does not include the BelPT as a routine part of its Beryllium Surveillance Program, OSHA-H005C-2006-0870-0146; Compare and Contrast Points, OSHA-H005C-2006-0870-0154.]