

THE NEW HEXVALENT CHROMIUM OSHA STANDARD:

In February of this year, OSHA published a new standard in the Federal Register that enforces the new Permissible Exposure Limits (PEL) for hexavalent chromium, the substance made infamous by the movie "Erin Brockovich." The standard lowers the limit from 52 micrograms per cubic meter of air for an 8-hour time weighter average, to 5 micrograms per cubic meter.

While this new standard is a great improvement on the previously enforced one, let us consider something else: In a proposed standard in October 2004, OSHA's proposed PEL for hexavalent chromium was 1 microgram per cubic meter of air. What changed OSHA's mind? The agency determined that 5 micrograms per cubic meter of air would be "more technologically and economically feasible for industries impacted by the standard." OSHA issued a final regulation that is five times the original proposal shown by its own research to be safe.

The ugly truth is that a 153-page report summarizing an industry-sponsored study of workers in chromium plants in the United States and Germany concluded that exposure ranging from 1.2 to 5.8 micrograms resulted in a fivefold increase in deaths from lung cancer. According to a Forbes article, published last week, the EPA may file suit, under the Toxic Substances Control Act, against the industry for withholding information found in the study that supports a stricter standard. The approximate half a million American workers impacted by this ruling include steel workers, chrome platers, welders and paint and pigment workers.

HOSPITALS NEED PATIENT-LIFTING GEAR TO PREVENT INJURIES

The Associated Press reported "backbreaking work lifting patients is hurting nurses and other hospital workers, with avoidable injuries triggering chronic pain, disability leaves and an early end to many careers, exacerbating staffing shortages."

Armed with a survey showing a majority of nurses and X-ray technicians have been hurt lifting patients, AFT Healthcare and its New Jersey affiliate on Thursday urged passage of laws requiring hospitals to buy equipment such as portable hoists to protect health workers and patients, who sometimes are dropped during accidents.

"It really is time for legislation because the equipment has been out there, employers are aware of it," said Candace Owley, chairwoman of AFT Healthcare, which represents 70,000 nurses, therapists and technicians at hospitals in 18 states. **[Click Here for Entire Article](#)**