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Status of the Use and Environmental Release of Asbestos analyzed by using PRTR Data in Japan

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Abstract

The Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) system was implemented in Japan in April 2001. Since then, the designated industrial facilities have been required to report amounts of hazardous chemicals released into the environment or transferred outside the facilities under the system. Also, the regulatory authorities have estimated the emissions from undesignated facilities, households and mobile sources. Every year the authorities publish these reported or estimated values as PRTR data. So far the data for 2001 and 2002 are available. This report describes the use of asbestos and the associated environmental pollution in Japan based on these published PRTR data.

Asbestos will be banned essentially from use in Japan in October 2004. Even now when the regulatory framework has not yet been implemented, however, the industries are voluntarily refraining themselves from using asbestos. The consumption, which was more than 200,000 tons 20 years ago, fell below 100,000 tons several years ago. Subsequently, the figure has further dropped to a level of several tens of thousand tons.

PRTR data indicate that asbestos transferred as waste from 10 industrial sectors totaled approximately 3,167 tons for fiscal year 2002, which indicates that the material is extensively used. Approximately three tons of asbestos are estimated to be emitted from the railroad industry, where the material is used mainly for brake pads. This fact strongly suggests that the material is used for the same application in the automobile industry. The government, however, does not publish any estimate of the emission of asbestos in the automobile industry under the pretence that no reliable data are available. The actual emission of asbestos into the environment, therefore, may be greater than the official figure published by the government.