Brush Wellman Inc. Commends Federal Agency On Work Toward Addressing Occupational Exposure to Beryllium

CLEVELAND, Nov 26, 2002 (BUSINESS WIRE) --

Brush Wellman Inc. today commended the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for releasing a Request for Information (RFI) designed to explore a number of complex issues in the determination of an appropriate course of action regarding occupational beryllium exposure.

At one-third lighter than aluminum and six times stiffer than steel, beryllium is a unique specialty material used in products ranging from telecommunications and defense applications to medical diagnostic equipment. In its solid form or as contained in consumer products such as cellular phones, beryllium poses no special health risks. In manufacturing operations, some workers who are exposed to beryllium-containing dust, fume or mist and subsequently demonstrate a sensitivity to beryllium can develop a serious lung disorder known as chronic beryllium disease (CBD). Most individuals exposed to airborne beryllium particulate will not develop sensitization to beryllium or contract CBD.

"We commend OSHA for its thorough and thoughtful approach in addressing worker protection associated with the production of beryllium," said Marc Kolanz, Vice President, Environmental, Health and Safety. "Responses to the questions posed by OSHA in this RFI should help fill the existing data gaps regarding the best way to protect people working with this material. The agency has appropriately recognized the need for up-to-date scientific information in a number of important areas, including the significance of how measuring beryllium exposures based on particle size and chemical form may affect worker health."

For the past four years, Brush Wellman has been in a formal research partnership with OSHA’s sister agency, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), in order to develop the scientific knowledge that will help prevent beryllium-related health effects.

"We believe our cooperative research efforts with NIOSH are generating the scientific information that will assist OSHA toward well-considered action regarding occupational exposure to beryllium," added Kolanz.

In addition to active collaboration, Brush Wellman has provided NIOSH with access to Brush Wellman employees and work sites for independent research. Currently, this work includes studies of genetic risk factors for beryllium sensitization and disease, and an examination of the relationship between genetic and environmental factors. Investigation and research have focused on:

-- The natural history and predictors of health outcomes in sensitized persons and persons diagnosed with CBD (sub-clinical and clinical chronic beryllium disease).
-- How, when, why and in what way sensitization sometimes progresses to disease.
-- Skin exposure to beryllium and the possible relationship of this exposure to beryllium sensitization.
-- The use of medical surveillance as a tool to predict beryllium sensitization and development of CBD.
-- The reliability of the Beryllium Blood Lymphocyte Proliferation Test (BeBLPT) and its efficacy as a predictor of CBD.
-- Particle size distributions and counts in the workplace and their relationship to beryllium sensitization and CBD.
-- Measures such as particle size, particle number, chemistry and shape that could be better predictors of risk than total mass exposure.
-- The relationship between genetic factors and beryllium sensitization and CBD.
"For more than 50 years, Brush Wellman Inc. has provided proactive, industry-leading communications regarding beryllium health and safety," he said. "We believe it's important to communicate this information to promote the safe and environmentally responsible use and handling of beryllium. We support OSHA's commitment to preventing beryllium-related health effects and encourage the scientific community and end users to respond to OSHA's Request for Information."

Brush Wellman Inc., headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Brush Engineered Materials Inc. (NYSE:BW). The Company, through its wholly-owned subsidiaries, supplies worldwide markets with beryllium products, alloy products, electronic products, precious metal products, and engineered material systems.

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