

Asbestos Ban Moves Closer to Law

Oct. 5 -- The United States could become the 41st country to ban asbestos if a bill passed unanimously Thursday by the Senate becomes law.

The legislation, in the works for six years under the guidance of Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., prohibits the importing, manufacturing, processing and distribution of products containing the carcinogen. It's up to the Environmental Protection Agency to issue rules ensuring asbestos products are off the shelves within two years of the bill's enactment.

Murray collaborated with Sens. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee, on the bill.

Asbestos hasn't been mined in the country since 2002 but can still be found in some 3,000 products, including hair dryers, ceiling tiles and vehicle braking systems. The United States imports most of its asbestos minerals from Canada.

A companion House bill, introduced by Betty McCollum, D-Minn., is awaiting action in the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Murray's bill, which would amend the Toxic Substances Control Act, covers half a dozen regulated forms of asbestos and three durable fibers. In addition, it calls for creating a \$50 million research and treatment network for asbestos-related diseases; expanding an existing disease registry to include other patients with asbestos-related diseases; directing the Pentagon to conduct additional research on asbestos disease, early detection and treatment; and launching an EPA-direct public education campaign about the dangers of asbestos, a cancer-causing material.

“This is a historic day in the fight to protect Americans,” Murray said in an e-mail statement. “Workers and their families deserve a future free of deadly asbestos exposure, and I’m not stopping until this bill is signed into law.”