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Public Citizen to OSHA: Enforce Labeling Law for Toxic Coal Byproduct

Workers Using Coal Slag Abrasive Are Exposed to Dangerous Levels of Cancer-Causing Chemical

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) should enforce a law requiring manufacturers of coal slag abrasive to disclose that their product contains dangerous levels of beryllium, [Public Citizen said in a letter](#) sent today to OSHA enforcement director Thomas Galassi. Workers use coal slag abrasive to blast ship hulls, bridges and other metal structures in preparation for painting.

“Workers have a right to know if they are being exposed to toxic chemicals,” said Justin Feldman, worker health and safety advocate with Public Citizen’s Congress Watch division. “But coal slag manufacturers are not indicating that their product contains cancer-causing beryllium. Some companies even have the audacity to market their product as non-toxic. OSHA needs to enforce the law and end this practice at once.”

OSHA’s right-to-know rules require manufacturers to disclose the toxic chemicals in their products if workers might be exposed to unsafe levels. The requirement should apply to coal slag abrasive, as a number of studies have demonstrated that people working with the product are routinely exposed to levels of beryllium that exceed OSHA standards. Beryllium exposure causes lung cancer and chronic beryllium disease, a debilitating lung condition.

“OSHA’s enforcement [staff has known about this issue for several months](#), and we are calling on them to do the right thing,” Feldman said. “**Dozens of blasting workers die each year from beryllium exposure. If OSHA just enforces the rules that are already on the books, it will save lives.**”