

OSHA Lowers Beryllium Exposure Limits

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On January 6, 2017, the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a [final rule](#) lowering occupational exposure limits for beryllium.

Beryllium is a lightweight metal used in various industries, including the aerospace, defense, telecommunications, automotive, electronic, and medical specialty industries. When inhaled, beryllium is highly toxic and can result in lung damage, including a condition known as chronic beryllium disease.

The final rule establishes new permissible exposure limits (PELs) of 0.2 micrograms of beryllium per cubic meter of air ($0.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) as an 8-hour time-weighted average and $2.0 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ as a short-term exposure limit determined over a sampling period of 15 minutes. The previous 8-hour PEL was $2.0 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and was, according to OSHA, "based on decades-old studies." In addition to the new PELs, the rule includes requirements regarding exposure assessment, methods for controlling exposure, respiratory protection, personal protective clothing and equipment, housekeeping, medical surveillance, hazard communication, and recordkeeping.

OSHA published its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for beryllium on August 7, 2015, and received public comments along with holding two days of public hearings in early 2016. The final rule includes several significant changes from the proposed rule as a result of stakeholder comment, including: narrowing the definition of "beryllium work areas" and extending certain compliance dates to allow employers more time to comply with the requirements of the rule.

The new exposure limits apply to general industry, construction, and shipyards. The rule was published in the *Federal Register* on January 9, 2017, and will be effective on March 10, 2017. In light of stakeholder comments to the rule, however, OSHA is providing staggered compliance dates. Once the rule is effective, employers have one year to implement the majority of the rule's provisions.

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