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# Bush Administration seeking to weaken workplace toxin rules

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Bush Administration is trying to push through a measure that would severely weaken the regulation of workplace exposures to dangerous chemicals.

The rule change calls for "re-examining how to determine risks posed by workplace toxic exposure."

The Washington Post reported that Labor Secretary Elaine Chao's intention to push for the rule first surfaced on July 7, when the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) posted on its Web site that it was reviewing the proposal, identified only by its nine-word title.

David Michaels, a workplace safety professor at George Washington University's School of Public Health, said, "This is a guarantee to keep any more worker safety regulation from ever coming out ... This is being done in secrecy, to be sprung before President Bush leaves office, to cripple the next Administration."

Among other changes, the proposed rule reportedly would create additional public notice and review by Labor Department political appointees before the Occupational Safety and Health Administration does any risk assessments that lead to limits on exposure to chemicals or toxins in the workplace.

The current assumption that workers serve for 45 years, and thus would be exposed to compounds such as asbestos or lead for 45 years, is also being revis-

ited, the Post reported.

Some industry groups consider the current policy for establishing exposure limits overly stringent and have sought changes.

The fast-track approach has brought criticism from workplace-safety advocates, unions and Democrats in Congress.

Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), chair-

man of the House Education and Labor Committee, said: "The fact that the Department of Labor seems to be engaged in secret rulemaking makes me highly suspicious that some high-level political appointees are up to no good. This Congress will not stand for the gutting of health and safety protections as the Bush Administration heads out the door."

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