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USW Applauds OSHA Release of Beryllium Standard

(Pittsburgh) – The United Steelworkers (USW) today praised the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for the release of the final rule for occupational exposure to beryllium and beryllium compounds in general industry, construction and maritime.

“This has been a long time in the making,” said USW International President Leo W. Gerard. “The USW has advocated for an OSHA rule since the early 1970s. This rule will protect workers who are exposed to beryllium in general industry, construction and shipyards and ensure that controls are put in place to prevent future occupational illness from developing.”

The USW represents several thousand workers who use beryllium alloys and beryllium-containing products in a number of industries.

The first occupational exposure limit to beryllium was set in 1949. OSHA first proposed a standard in 1975, but political pressure forced cancellation of the rulemaking. In 2012, a collaborative effort between Materion Brush, the world’s largest beryllium producer, and the USW resulted in a draft standard that the union and company jointly presented to OSHA.

“Although the process took decades, the result is a strong, protective worker health rule,” said Michael Wright, USW Director of Health, Safety and Environment. Wright’s first assignment with the union was to participate in the original rulemaking attempt. Even with the long lag, the USW never lost sight of the need for a new standard.

Under the new rule, permissible exposure limits are significantly reduced. The rule also includes provisions that require employers to assess exposure, implement methods for controlling exposure, provide protective clothing and equipment, perform medical surveillance, and continue the wages and benefits of workers who become sensitized to beryllium.

The final rule is effective 60 days after the publication of the proposal in the Federal Register.

The USW continues to fight for occupational safety and health regulations that affect workers’ lives and to promote recognition of occupational hazards.

The USW represents 850,000 workers in North America employed in many industries that include metals, rubber, chemicals, paper, oil refining and the service and public sectors. For more information: <http://www.usw.org/>.

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