

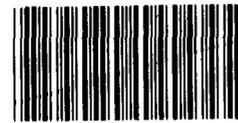
GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee
on Treasury, Postal Service and General
Government, Committee on
Appropriations, U.S. Senate

January 1992

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Efforts to Communicate About Asbestos Abatement Not Always Effective



145651



General Government Division

B-246093

January 16, 1992

The Honorable Dennis DeConcini
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Treasury, Postal Service and
General Government
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report responds to your request that we assess the General Services Administration's (GSA) efforts to communicate with tenant agencies about asbestos abatement projects in federal buildings. The request stemmed from the Subcommittee's concern that GSA was not doing a good enough job in allaying employee fears and concerns about the planned asbestos abatement work at the John F. Kennedy (JFK) federal building in Boston.

Results in Brief

GSA's efforts to communicate with tenant agencies about asbestos abatement projects during fiscal years 1990 and 1991 in the 15 federal buildings we reviewed varied in effectiveness. At 10 of the 15 buildings, GSA's communication was generally reactive; initial information was meager, and effective communication occurred only after tenant agency employees complained about the lack of timely and adequate information. At the five other buildings, GSA's approach was more proactive because GSA made efforts to provide information at the beginning and throughout the course of the projects. Tenant agency employees for these five buildings had fewer complaints and said they were generally satisfied with the communication process.

GSA's vague guidance to its asbestos coordinators on how to communicate with tenant agencies about asbestos abatement projects may be one reason the communication efforts varied. In essence, GSA's asbestos coordinators had a great deal of discretion in how they communicated the information to tenant agencies. For example, GSA's guidance said that building tenants must be kept aware of ongoing abatement actions but did not provide any specifics on how or when this communication should be accomplished. GSA's oversight of the communication process was too limited to identify inconsistencies or assess how well the process worked. GSA's oversight relied on information from biennial evaluations,

sporadic calls, and tenant complaints. GSA usually received this information after problems had surfaced and oversight efforts amounted to damage control.

GSA has recognized the need to improve its communication practices and, in April 1991, revised its guidance. This guidance emphasized the importance of early and continuing communication and identified specific steps for communicating with tenant agencies. Although the guidance was a step in the right direction, GSA has not addressed the need for better oversight of the communication efforts. Without better oversight, GSA will not be able to adequately assess whether the revised guidance improves communications or if tenant agency employees are satisfied.

Background

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that can cause cancer. It was used to fireproof wallboard, ceilings, and floor tiles and to insulate mechanical equipment in many federal buildings between 1950 and 1973. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), asbestos containing material (ACM) that is in good condition and has not been disturbed poses a negligible health risk. However, exposure to damaged or disturbed ACM can be hazardous to an individual's health.

Whenever GSA begins a repair and alteration project in a federal building that contains ACM, asbestos can be disturbed. GSA must then abate the asbestos by either repairing, removing, or enclosing it. At the time of our review, GSA had 15 major asbestos abatement projects underway—each costing \$1 million or more—along with numerous smaller projects. The estimated cost for the 15 asbestos abatement projects totaled over \$120 million. Furthermore, according to GSA officials, because many of the buildings in their inventory contain asbestos, asbestos abatement projects will be under way well into the next century and cost millions of dollars.

Because of the link between asbestos and cancer, abatement of asbestos can be a very sensitive and emotionally charged issue. In 1990, EPA published guidance entitled Managing Asbestos in Place that stressed the importance of open and honest communication about ACM between a building owner and the building's tenants. The guidance noted that open and honest communication could eliminate or reduce hysteria about ACM. The guidance further stated that the lack of open and honest communication could cause tenants to question the owner's credibility and could result in problems.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to assess GSA's efforts to communicate with and notify tenant agencies about asbestos abatement projects in federal buildings that GSA manages. To meet this objective, we did work at GSA's headquarters and 15 federal buildings located in 6 GSA regional offices (Region 2—New York; Region 3—Philadelphia; Region 4—Atlanta; Region 5—Chicago; Region 7—Fort Worth; and Region 9—San Francisco). We chose these buildings because they contained GSA's 15 largest asbestos abatement projects (\$1 million dollars and over) that were under way during fiscal years 1990 and 1991.

At GSA's Central Office, we interviewed program officials from its Safety and Environmental Division and analyzed relevant documents to assess GSA's policies, guidance, and processes for (1) communicating with tenant agency employees about asbestos abatement and (2) overseeing and monitoring GSA's communication efforts. We also analyzed Safety and Environmental Management Program evaluations completed in fiscal years 1990 and 1991 for those regions and field offices where the 15 buildings were located.

To assess GSA's communication efforts with tenant agencies, we visited 4 buildings and contacted GSA and tenant officials at 11 other buildings. For all 15 buildings, using a structured interview guide, we interviewed GSA's asbestos coordinators responsible for abatement project communication. We determined from these interviews how they approached asbestos abatement communication and if they had received any complaints regarding these efforts. To obtain tenant agency views on GSA's communication efforts, we identified the two or three largest agencies that comprised the majority of the tenants in each building; then, using a structured guide, we interviewed those agencies' liaisons with GSA. From these interviews we determined whether tenant agency employees had complained about GSA's communication efforts during the abatement project and what the complaints were about.

At the buildings we visited, we also interviewed top tenant agency officials and employee union representatives regarding their satisfaction with and concerns about GSA's communication practices. We also analyzed documents—minutes of tenant agency meetings, correspondence, notification letters, and newsletters—that GSA used to communicate with tenant agencies. The federal buildings that we included in our review and the tenant agencies that we contacted are listed in appendix I.

After we documented and analyzed information on the communication process at each building, we made judgments and characterized GSA's communication efforts as either generally reactive or proactive. We classified GSA's efforts as reactive when the evidence showed that GSA did not provide adequate and timely project information to address tenant agency concerns until agency employees complained. When the evidence showed that GSA provided adequate project information on a continuous basis, we classified GSA's efforts as proactive. We did our work between November 1990 and July 1991 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

GSA's Efforts to Communicate With Tenant Agencies Varied

GSA's efforts to communicate with tenant agencies about asbestos abatement projects in the 15 federal buildings we reviewed varied. At 10 of the 15 federal buildings, GSA's communication efforts were generally reactive. At the remaining 5 buildings, GSA's communication efforts were generally proactive. Appendix II summarizes our assessment of GSA's communication efforts and identifies tenant agencies' major complaints.

Reactive Communication Efforts

At each of the 10 federal buildings where GSA's communication efforts were reactive, we found at least 1 of 3 major complaints. GSA's asbestos coordinator did not always (1) provide adequate information at the beginning of the abatement projects, (2) give timely or accurate information, or (3) communicate regularly about the progress of the projects. Following tenant agency employee complaints at these buildings, GSA's communication efforts improved.

At nine of these buildings, GSA provided little or inadequate information at the beginning of the projects. According to tenant agency liaisons, GSA did not provide information that was specific enough to address their concerns. For example, at the JFK building in Boston, GSA initially provided only information about the overall renovation project. It did not mention that asbestos abatement would also occur. At the Lubbock building in Lubbock, Texas, GSA initially announced the asbestos project without providing a description. Tenant agency employees did not receive information on the measures GSA was taking to protect their health and safety until 3 months after GSA started the project. GSA officials said they did not address the abatement issues earlier because they did not know all the specific details about the project. Tenant agency officials said this reason was not good enough because as soon as

employees learned that GSA would do asbestos abatement in their buildings, their anxiety levels increased. The employees wanted immediate answers to at least their general health and safety questions.

At 8 of the 10 buildings, tenant agency liaisons said GSA either did not respond quickly to their concerns and questions or did not always provide accurate information about the project. In some cases, GSA did not adequately address concerns and questions about the projects for years. For example, in 1986 tenant agency employees at the Pepper building in Miami, Florida, first raised concerns and questions about what safeguards and safety precautions GSA would take. Their concerns continued until 1988 when the GSA contractor finally provided specific, detailed information. Similarly, tenant agency officials at the JFK building met with GSA to ask about what measures GSA would take to protect employees' health and safety during the abatement process, and GSA took over a year to respond. At the Dirksen building in Chicago, the abatement project had been under way for over a year when a tenant agency official met with GSA to request information on safety procedures. The tenant agency official then wrote a follow-up letter requesting this information again. About 30 days later, GSA responded. According to the GSA coordinators, these issues were not addressed sooner because they either (1) did not have the expertise needed to provide specific, detailed information and therefore had to rely on the contractors to answer these questions; or (2) had not completely developed the asbestos abatement approach, including what safeguards GSA would take.

At three other buildings, tenant agency liaisons said GSA provided inaccurate information about where, when, or how the work would be done. For example at the Fallon building, GSA told tenants that the asbestos abatement would be done only in certain limited areas. However, according to tenant agency liaisons, major abatement work was started in other areas, but GSA did not inform the tenant agency until the work was under way. GSA's asbestos coordinators said the inaccurate information was a result of project changes that they did not immediately notify tenants about. The coordinators also said they had not realized how important it was for the tenants to receive information about project changes as soon as possible.

At 6 of the 10 buildings, GSA did not regularly communicate with tenant agency employees about the project. According to tenant agency liaisons at these buildings, GSA met with them infrequently and on an ad hoc basis. Generally, GSA's asbestos coordinators said they did not believe

that regular meetings were needed and said that tenant agencies should be notified only when major changes in the project occurred. On the other hand, most tenant agency liaisons wanted regular meetings to discuss the status of the project and to verify that the health and safety measures continued to be adequate.

At three of the six buildings, GSA did not regularly provide tenants with the air monitoring results as specified in its guidance. In fact, at the Davis building in Memphis, Tennessee, the GSA asbestos coordinator as well as the three tenant agency liaisons we interviewed said that GSA never provided air sampling results. The GSA asbestos coordinator explained that he did not think it was necessary to provide this information because the abatement work was done on the weekends. Furthermore, at four buildings tenant agencies hired industrial hygienists or health consultants to provide independent information on the abatement process because they did not trust GSA to regularly provide adequate information on health and safety precautions. When we asked why the agencies had to go to such lengths, GSA's asbestos coordinators told us they either (1) did not have the expertise to answer all health and safety questions; (2) had not realized the importance of providing health and safety information; (3) were not aware that the health and safety information they had provided was insufficient; or (4) had not completely developed the approach for abating asbestos, including what safeguards GSA would take.

Tenant agency employees at all 10 buildings complained and expressed concerns about their health and safety during the asbestos abatement projects. At most of these buildings, the employees complained to either the asbestos coordinators or to their agency liaisons that the information GSA provided about the project was inadequate. However, at four of the buildings the complaints were more vehement, and these employees contacted congressional representatives to express their dissatisfaction with GSA's communication efforts and to convey their health and safety concerns.

Following these complaints, GSA's communication efforts at all 10 buildings improved, and information about the projects was regularly provided to the tenant employees. For example, GSA began (1) holding regular meetings with tenants at the Juneau and Pepper buildings, (2) forming tenant agency councils at the Pepper and JFK buildings, and (3) developing training sessions on asbestos abatement for tenants at the JFK building. Thus, when pressured by tenant agencies, GSA did communicate effectively about the asbestos abatement projects.

GSA's asbestos coordinators cited two reasons for their reactive communication efforts. First, they underestimated the tenants' concerns and fears about asbestos and therefore did not devote full-time attention to communications. Second, at the beginning of these projects, they did not always have the expertise or in-depth knowledge about asbestos to adequately respond to the tenants' questions and concerns.

Proactive Communication Efforts

GSA's communication efforts at the five other buildings were more proactive because the asbestos coordinators there personally valued and realized the importance of effective communication. According to tenant agency officials, the GSA officials at these buildings provided adequate information to tenant agency employees before and during the project, and only a few tenant agency employees complained. Tenant agency officials also said GSA had developed good working relationships with them over the years that also contributed to good communication.

At all five of these buildings, GSA met with tenant agency employees before the projects began and provided them with information about the health risks of asbestos and the safety precautions that GSA would take. In addition, early in the projects, GSA discussed specific project information on when and where the abatement would occur. For example, at the Rodino building in Newark, New Jersey, GSA officials held several meetings before the project began. GSA officials held the first meeting about 2 months before the project was approved. At subsequent meetings the officials provided project updates; about 2 weeks before the start of the project, GSA officials held another meeting and discussed specific details about the project.

In addition, GSA's asbestos coordinators communicated regularly with tenants during the projects to educate them about the abatement process and to keep them informed about the projects' status. At these buildings, GSA's asbestos coordinators either communicated during regular meetings with the tenants or used a variety of other communication methods—newsletters, memos, notices, and air monitoring results.

According to tenant agency liaisons, GSA's asbestos coordinators at three buildings went further to educate tenants about the abatement process and to help allay any concerns. At the Wilshire Boulevard building in Los Angeles, GSA developed a model abatement area where tenant agency employees could see how the asbestos abatement would be done. At the Clark Street building in Chicago and the Rodino building in

Newark, New Jersey, GSA conducted tours with top tenant agency officials of the office space to be abated.

According to tenant agency liaisons, good working relationships developed and maintained by GSA and the tenant agencies also aided the communication efforts at these buildings. For example, at the Wilshire Boulevard building and the Rodino building, as well as at the Philip Burton building in San Francisco, GSA officials and the tenant agency liaisons met regularly to discuss various building issues long before the asbestos project began. The tenant agency liaisons said these GSA asbestos coordinators listened to their concerns and provided honest answers to their questions. GSA and the tenant agencies openly communicated with each other, and an atmosphere of trust developed.

Because GSA initially provided tenant agency employees with adequate information, regularly communicated with them about the project, and maintained good working relationships, the problems and concerns that arose were largely resolved. At these five buildings, few tenant agency employees complained about GSA's communication efforts.

Vague Guidance and Limited Oversight Might Have Contributed to GSA's Varying Communication Efforts

GSA's vague guidance on how to communicate about asbestos abatement and limited oversight of the communication process might have contributed to GSA's varying communication efforts. The guidance generally said that GSA officials must keep building tenants informed of on-going asbestos activities. It did not elaborate on how or what to communicate about these abatement projects. Additionally, GSA's oversight of the communication process was limited. GSA did not actively monitor how the process was working but rather depended on limited information it obtained during biennial safety and environmental evaluations, telephone calls, and tenant complaints. This information was often obtained too late to avoid problems or improve communication efforts.

GSA's Guidance Provided Few Specifics

GSA's August 1988 Safety and Environmental Management Program Handbook was the guidance GSA asbestos coordinators used when communicating about the projects in our review. This guidance provided very limited information on how, to whom, what, and when to communicate with tenant agencies and employees. The guidance contained only two specific requirements. First, the guidance said GSA must notify tenant agencies about an asbestos abatement project either through agency liaisons, posted notices, or both at least 2 weeks before beginning the project. Second, the guidance said GSA must notify agency heads of

air sampling results. The guidance was silent on what types of information should be communicated, and it did not stress the importance of early and continuing communication. Because of this vague guidance, GSA's local asbestos coordinators had substantial discretion in how they communicated with tenant agencies.

Limited Oversight

In addition to the vague guidance, GSA did not have an effective oversight process to monitor and evaluate the asbestos coordinators' communication efforts before and during asbestos abatement projects. GSA's regional and field office Safety and Environmental Management Program evaluations were the nearest GSA came to evaluating these efforts. But these evaluations did not provide the timely and specific information GSA needed to identify potential problems or improve the communication efforts of on-going projects. These evaluations focused on how effectively GSA managed day-to-day building operations from a health and safety perspective and covered several topics—such as hazardous waste, radon, and indoor air quality. Also, these evaluations (1) were done on a 2-year cycle that might not have coincided with the asbestos abatement projects' time frames and (2) placed little emphasis on assessing the effectiveness or quality of GSA's communication efforts.

Our analysis of 10 field evaluation reports for the buildings where GSA's communication efforts were reactive showed that only 2 of the 10 reports said communication efforts needed improving, and 3 of the 10 reports said GSA's communication efforts were good even though tenants had complained about these efforts. The remaining five evaluations did not specifically assess communication efforts. These five evaluations were not a good indicator of whether or not the communication process was effective or if problems occurred during asbestos projects.

In addition to the evaluations, GSA headquarters officials said they received information about the communication process from local asbestos coordinators as well as building tenants. This information was most frequently provided informally, via telephone calls. Generally, calls from the local asbestos coordinators were warnings about problems, and calls from the tenants were usually complaints. Like evaluations, however, GSA usually received this information after the problems occurred and tenant agency officials were already upset.

GSA's approach has been to fix asbestos communication problems after they have surfaced rather than to prevent them from occurring by

establishing clear, specific guidance and effectively monitoring the communication process. GSA has not provided adequate oversight of the communication process to identify or avoid potential problems and assess the communication process.

Communication Guidance Improved, but Oversight Efforts Not Addressed

GSA recognized that it needed to improve its communication efforts and in April 1991 revised its principal communication guidance. This guidance, entitled Safety and Environmental Management Handbook, superseded the 1988 handbook and clearly said that information on asbestos renovation, abatement, and maintenance activities should be made available and should be discussed with affected client agencies on a regular basis. Among other things, the revised guidance emphasized the importance of early and continuing communication and identified specific steps for the asbestos coordinators to follow when communicating with tenant agency employees.

GSA also developed three other documents that supplemented the new handbook and, in part, addressed asbestos communication and provided specific tools for asbestos coordinators to use. The first, an Asbestos Operations and Maintenance Program Manual issued on September 24, 1990, included a checklist that asbestos coordinators could follow to record and document all communication efforts with tenant agencies. The second, a memorandum on Improved Tenant Project Communications issued on December 17, 1990, provided samples of a pamphlet and brochure that asbestos coordinators should issue to tenants in buildings where renovations and asbestos abatement would be done. And third, on September 18, 1991, GSA issued a document titled Asbestos Project Communications that suggested topics, audiences, and methods of conveying information or responding to tenant questions for each stage of an asbestos abatement project.

Although the new handbook and the other documents were steps in the right direction to improve the communication efforts, GSA has not addressed the need for improved oversight of its abatement communication process. Even with the best of guidance, there is no assurance that it will be followed or used effectively. Without active oversight to determine if the asbestos coordinators are taking adequate steps to implement the guidance and communicate with tenant agencies about the abatement projects, communication efforts may not improve.

Conclusions

GSA's asbestos communication efforts could be improved. Tenant agency employees in 10 of the 15 buildings we contacted were not satisfied with GSA's communication efforts. GSA recognized that improvements were needed and took a step in the right direction by revising its guidance. However, GSA has not addressed the need for more effective oversight of the asbestos communication process. Unless GSA has an effective oversight process to monitor its communication efforts, GSA officials will not be in a good position to determine whether the revised guidance is working or whether tenant agencies are satisfied.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Administrator of GSA establish an oversight process to determine (1) the adequacy of current guidance on communication about asbestos abatement with tenant agencies and (2) whether tenant agency employees are satisfied with the communication process.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In a November 18, 1991, letter the Administrator of GSA provided written comments on a draft of this report and agreed with our recommendation. (See app. III.) He said GSA was in the final stages of issuing an asbestos program videotape to aid in obtaining consistent, proactive communication with occupants in buildings containing asbestos. With regard to our recommendation for improved oversight of the communication process, he said GSA intended to make the asbestos communication process a special emphasis item during GSA headquarters evaluations of the regions. He also said GSA would explore ways to

- better use its field personnel, contractors, and regional professional staffs in communicating with occupants before and during asbestos abatement projects, especially for those projects over \$1 million, and
- ascertain client satisfaction with the communication process at each stage of the project.

These actions would be consistent with the thrust of our recommendation.

As agreed with the Subcommittee, we are sending copies of this report to the Administrator of GSA, and other interested parties. Copies of this report will also be made available to others upon request.

Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me on (202) 275-8676.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Nye Stevens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and a stylized "Nye Stevens".

L. Nye Stevens
Director, Government Business
Operations Issues

Federal Buildings and Tenant Agencies in Our Review

Building	Agency
Philip Burton Federal Building San Francisco, California ^a	Federal Bureau of Investigation Department of Housing and Urban Development Internal Revenue Service U.S. District Courts
John F. Kennedy Federal Building Boston, Massachusetts ^a	Department of Health and Human Services Internal Revenue Service Department of Veterans Affairs
Raleigh Federal Building Raleigh, North Carolina ^a	U.S. District Courts U.S. Marshals Service U.S. Postal Service
Rodino Federal Building Newark, New Jersey ^a	Immigration and Naturalization Service Internal Revenue Service U.S. Attorneys Office
536 South Clark Street Federal Building Chicago, Illinois	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Department of Veterans Affairs
Clifford Davis Federal Building Memphis, Tennessee	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers U.S. Attorneys Office U.S. District Courts
Everett Dirksen Federal Building Chicago, Illinois	Federal Bureau of Investigation U.S. Attorneys Office U.S. District Courts
GH Fallon Federal Building Baltimore, Maryland	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Internal Revenue Service Department of Veterans Affairs
Jacob Javits Federal Building New York, New York	Department of Health and Human Services Environmental Protection Agency Federal Bureau of Investigation
Juneau Federal Building Juneau, Alaska	Forest Service U.S. Coast Guard
Lubbock Federal Building Lubbock, Texas	Department of Labor; Occupational, Safety, and Health Administration Department of Housing and Urban Development Internal Revenue Service
300 North Los Angeles Street Federal Building Los Angeles, California	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Internal Revenue Service
Claude Pepper Federal Building Miami, Florida	U.S. District Courts Department of State; Passport Office Internal Revenue Service
Byron Rodgers Federal Building Denver, Colorado	Department of Health and Human Services Department of Labor Federal Bureau of Investigation
11000 Wilshire Boulevard Federal Building Los Angeles, California	Federal Bureau of Investigation Department of Veterans Affairs

^aBuildings we visited.

GSA's Communication Efforts and Tenant Agencies' Major Complaints

Building	Number of occupants	Cost of abatement project	Communication		Tenants' major complaint(s)
			Proactive	Reactive	
Phillip Burton Federal Building San Francisco, California ^a	3,330	\$ 30,331,100	X		None
John F. Kennedy Federal Building Boston, Massachusetts ^a	2,622	32,900,000		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response
Raleigh Federal Building Raleigh, North Carolina ^a	666	5,259,900		X	Slow response Inaccurate information No regular communication
Rodino Federal Building Newark, New Jersey ^a	1,936	2,100,000	X		None
536 South Clark Street Federal Building Chicago, Illinois	1,311	1,032,000	X		None
Clifford Davis Federal Building Memphis, Tennessee	1,124	1,000,500		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response
Everett Dirksen Federal Building Chicago, Illinois	2,000	1,434,469		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response No regular communication
GH Fallon Federal Building Baltimore, Maryland	2,200	2,250,000		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response
Jacob Javits Federal Building New York, New York	10,000	1,100,000		X	Inadequate information No regular communication
Juneau Federal Building Juneau, Alaska	865	12,283,703		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response No regular communication
Lubbock Federal Building Lubbock, Texas	257	2,200,000		X	Inadequate information No regular communication
300 North Los Angeles Street Federal Building Los Angeles, California	4,000	10,000,000		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response No regular communication
Claude Pepper Federal Building Miami, Florida	600	5,750,000		X	Inadequate or inaccurate information Slow response
Byron Rodgers Federal Building Denver, Colorado	1,695	3,300,000	X		None
11000 Wilshire Boulevard Federal Building Los Angeles, California	1,945	9,270,923	X		None
Total	34,551	\$120,212,595	5	10	

^aBuildings we visited.

Source: GAO analysis of GSA data.

Comments From the General Services Administration



Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, DC 20405

November 18, 1991

The Honorable Charles A. Bowsher
Comptroller General
of the United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Bowsher:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft audit report entitled, "GSA Did Not Always Effectively Communicate with Tenant Agencies About Asbestos Abatement," GAO/GGD-92-XXX.

See p. 11.

The General Services Administration (GSA) appreciates your positive remarks about our new asbestos communication guidance issued in April 1991. You should also be aware that GSA is in the final stages of issuing an asbestos program videotape to further aid in obtaining consistent, proactive communications with occupants of our buildings containing asbestos. We believe these actions effectively address GAO's concerns about GSA's asbestos communications guidance.

See p. 11.

We agree with GAO's recommendations to improve GSA's oversight process. Oversight of GSA's asbestos communications is the primary responsibility of our regional offices. We intend to make the asbestos communications process a special emphasis item during our Central Office evaluations of our regions. In addition, GSA will explore ways to better use our trained field personnel, contractors, and regional professional staffs in communicating with occupants both before and during asbestos abatement projects, especially for asbestos projects over one million dollars. We also intend to explore ways to ascertain our clients' satisfaction with the communication process at each stage of the project, especially before work starts.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Sincerely,

Richard G. Austin
Administrator

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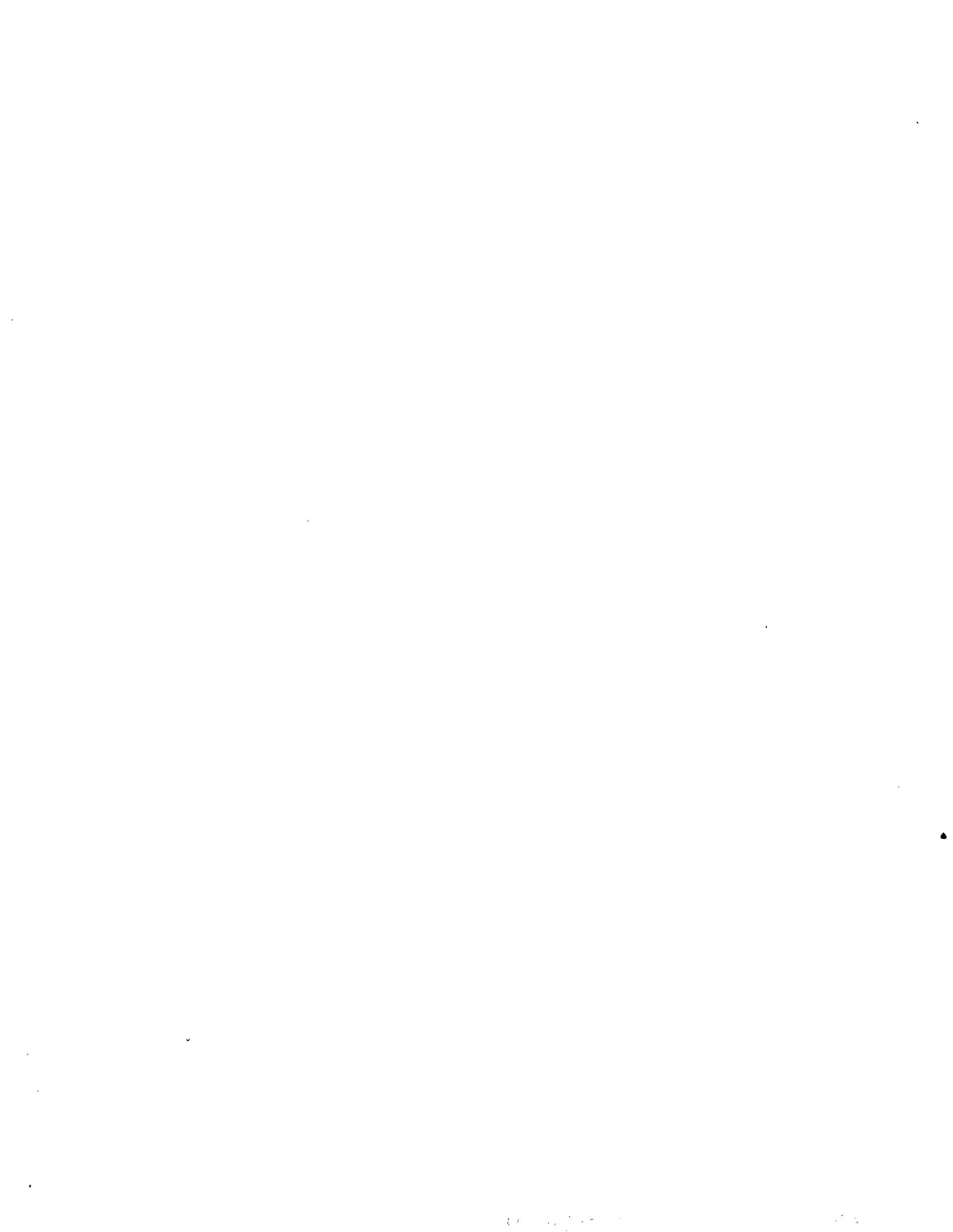
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