Ashford addresses reproductive hazard

By David Rho

Nicholas A. Ashford, associate professor of technology and policy, has proposed that people who face reproductive hazards in the workplace should be prepared to take action on their own if government agencies fail to act.

"Clearly, the human risks posed by reproductive hazards in the workplace are both serious and far-reaching," said Ashford.

"Reproductive hazards may well be the issue of the eighties. It is a concern that includes labor, environmental protection agencies, and women's groups."

The reproductive hazards Ashford cites include sterility in males caused by the pesticide dichlorobromopropane, various anaesthetic gases which cause malformed children in both males and females, and deleterious effects of the chemical treatment of drinking water.

"Hopefully, employers will recognize the need for voluntary abatement of reproductive hazards," Ashford said.

"In many cases, the most readily available mechanisms for preventive action will be those created by federal statute; in other instances, private actions may be required."

Two comprehensive federal statutes presently regulate hazards in the workplace, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). "Thus far," Ashford said, "reproductive hazards have been given little attention under OSHA."

Although TSCA provides a viable mechanism for the control of many serious reproductive hazards, Ashford continued, responsibility for enforcement rests with the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Donald Fenneday, former head of the EPA warns the public that reproductive hazards are "the issue of the eighties."

Workers may use either the "common law injunction" or "the collective bargaining agreement" to fight the hazards, Ashford said. An injunction relief is a court order enabling a worker to prohibit an employer from taking or continuing a particular action.

In the collective bargaining process, workers may include reduction of reproductive hazards as a condition of employment. "These available self-help mechanisms—both for preventive and compensatory relief—can provide an important complement to agency regulations," Ashford said.

"Although workers may take risks themselves," Ashford noted, "they are much less willing to take risks with their offspring and children."