

Take Caution With Asbestos

Asbestos is a broad term that applies to several materials that share similar properties and health risks. Though it's no longer as common as before, it's still important to learn about the dangers of asbestos and how to avoid it.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals used in certain products, such as

building materials and vehicle brakes, to resist heat and corrosion. Asbestos includes chrysotile, amosite, crocidolite, tremolite asbestos, anophyllite asbestos, actinolite asbestos, and any of these materials that have been chemically treated and/or altered.

Since its use has largely been discontinued in residential settings, asbestos is mostly a concern for those who work in industries that still utilize it. However, everyone should be wary of asbestos, especially if you come into contact with someone who works with it, or if you live close to an area where it is used or processed.

Are you being exposed to asbestos?

General industry employees may be exposed to asbestos during the manufacturing of asbestos-containing products or when performing brake and clutch repairs. In the construction industry, exposure occurs when workers disturb asbestos-containing materials during the renovation or demolition of buildings. Employees in maritime environments may also be exposed when renovating or demol-



ishing ships constructed with asbestos-containing materials. In addition, custodial workers may be exposed through contact with deteriorating materials in buildings that contain asbestos.

What are the dangers of asbestos exposure?

The inhalation of asbestos fibers by workers can cause serious diseases of the lungs and other organs. Symptoms may not appear until years after the exposure has occurred.

For instance, asbestosis can cause a buildup of scar-like tissue in the lungs and result in the loss of lung function that often progresses to disability and death. Asbestos fibers associated with these health risks are too small to be seen with the naked eye, and smokers are at higher risk of developing some asbestos-related diseases.

Asbestos can also cause a rare but malignant form of cancer called Mesothelioma, which usually affects the lung. Though most cases arise among those who are directly exposed to it,

Mesothelioma can occur in those with indirect exposure (such as family members of the exposed, or people living near asbestos mines or factories).

Therefore, it is crucial to see a health-care professional if you believe you're exposed to it in any way. Furthermore,

consult with your employer about asbestos safety if your job involves handling or being exposed to asbestos. Learn more at http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/asbestos/health_effects/

Source: OSHA, CDC

HIGHLIGHTS

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Since its use has largely been discontinued in residential settings, asbestos is mostly a concern for those who work in industries that still deal with asbestos, such as certain construction, shipbuilding, and custodial jobs.

Learn more about asbestos and the safety standards for working with it by visiting the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's factsheet: http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_AsbestosFacts/asbestos-factsheet.pdf

For more health topics, visit www.dadehealth.org/atoz/atoz.asp