Asbestos in Construction Stats and Facts



FACTS

1. Construction workers have a high risk of occupational asbestos exposure and of developing mesothelioma.

2. Asbestos found in contaminated construction materials such as paint, spackling, roof shingles, masonry compounds and drywall can be inhaled, which may lead to mesothelioma in construction workers.

3. Asbestos can cause two types of cancer:

Mesothelioma – a cancer of the lung lining. It is always fatal and is almost exclusively caused by exposure to asbestos. Thus, can arise several decades after inhaling the material.

Asbestos-related lung cancer – this is almost always fatal.

4. Asbestos is also linked to other serious lung diseases:

Asbestosis – a scarring of the lungs. It is not always fatal but can be a very debilitating disease.

Diffuse pleural thickening – a thickening of the membrane surrounding the lungs. This can restrict lung expansion leading to breathlessness.

5. Asbestos dust can spread around job sites quickly and expose many people in a short amount of time. The toxic dust also clings to clothes, hair and tools, traveling home with construction workers and placing their families in harm's way. This risk of secondary exposure can also develop into mesothelioma and other asbestos-related diseases.

STATS

- Asbestos is the biggest occupational disease risk to construction workers. HSE commissioned research estimates it was responsible for the death of over 2,500 construction workers.
- A 2017 report noted that 20% of air samples collected in the construction industry exceeded the OSHA permissible exposure limit of asbestos fibers.

The construction industry accounted for 70% to 80% of asbestos consumption throughout the 20th century.

- In an Italian study from 2017, analysts found between 350,000 and 3 million asbestos fibers in each of the workers' lungs. Construction workers who inhale or ingest asbestos fibers can develop malignant mesothelioma, asbestosis, lung cancer and other asbestos-related diseases.
- Research indicates that construction workers with longer careers have a higher risk of illness. One study funded by the National Institutes of Health found pleural abnormalities in 70% of construction workers who had spent at least 30 years in the field.
- Asbestos is no longer mined in the United States, but imported products still contain asbestos in unregulated amounts. Because of this failure to regulate, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 1.3 million construction and industrial workers are currently being exposed to potentially lethal asbestos.
- The construction industry accounts for 15 % of mesothelioma deaths, according to the CDC.