Can Asbestos Increase Your Risk of Mesothelioma?

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Mesothelioma and Asbestos

Pleural mesothelioma is a very rare form of cancer that generally attacks the lining around the lungs. There are also forms of mesothelioma that attack the abdomen and the lining of the heart, known as peritoneal and pericardial respectively. This rare form of cancer is believed to be exclusively caused by exposure to asbestos, as no confirmed diagnosis has had a different confirmed cause. So how do mesothelioma and asbestos correlate?

Mesothelioma is responsible for over 3000 deaths per year, and the number of confirmed cases of mesothelioma is on the rise. Mesothelioma tends to have a long latency period, and in many cases, it can be decades after the asbestos exposure before the onset of any symptoms. Unfortunately, the symptoms of pleural mesothelioma mimic those of other lung infections, so it is often not diagnosed until it is too late for any treatment to slow the disease.

What Is Asbestos?

Asbestos was very popular for use in construction during the 20th Century as it was cheap, easy to manufacture, and provided water and fire resistance to the project. Construction projects contain lots of sawing, sanding, and drilling – all things that produce a lot of dust.

Who Is at Risk for Developing Mesothelioma from Asbestos?

Construction workers are the largest occupational group of people that have been diagnosed with mesothelioma due to over-exposure to asbestos. Most buildings and houses erected between the 1920s and the 1980s run a great risk of having some sort of asbestos product still inside. Asbestos was used in flooring, roofing, insulation, pipes, boilers, and fireproofing materials.

When dealing with any structure that was built using asbestos products this dust is very dangerous. The worker will be inhaling the dust which allows the asbestos fibers to enter the body. The asbestos fibers get trapped in the body and cause irritation, pulmonary issues, and tumors.

Although the risks involved with working with asbestos were discovered in the 1980s, there are still several projects related to construction that use asbestos such as packing gaskets and roofing panels.

Of all asbestos products still being accepted for use today, 66% of them are for the construction industry. Construction workers today still run the risk of asbestos exposure, especially when they are renovating homes that were built pre-1990s.

How to Protect Yourself from Asbestos Exposure

There are many regulations today to protect workers from exposure, however, the risk is not always known when

diving into a renovation project in an older home.

If the risk of asbestos exposure is expected in a project, workers are expected to wear face makes and protective clothing to prevent the fibers from sticking to clothing, skin, and hair, and to prevent the worker from breathing in the fibers while they work. Unfortunately, these precautions do not eliminate the exposure factor to this dangerous material.

Asbestos is a fibrous material that can stick to clothing, shoes, hair, skin, etc., and can be taken home with you as well. The fact that it can stick to anything on your body that you are wearing or is exposed to during the construction project can also put your family at risk of exposure.

Repeated exposure to asbestos does increase the odds of developing mesothelioma, however, it has been found that even low levels of exposure can cause this fatal disease. As mentioned, mesothelioma tends to have a long latency period that can take up to 50 years to manifest symptoms. Many construction workers who were working pre-1990s that are still being diagnosed today, and likely more are to come.