



Jim Persons
jimpersons@safetypride.com
707-889-0881

Asbestos Dangers

Asbestos is a material that was widely used in many building materials which are still found around us today. While it is still in use in a few different materials today, much of its use was stopped in the late 1980s after research revealed the negative health effects associated with its fibers. Many people have heard that asbestos is bad for human health, but do not understand how or why this is the case.

What is Asbestos and Where is it Found?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals that are resistant to heat and corrosion. It has been used in products, such as insulation for pipes (steam lines for example), floor tiles, building materials, and in vehicle brakes and clutches. Some occupations whose workers have historically been exposed include construction workers, demolition crews, shipyard workers, automobile technicians, and those who worked in factories that produced asbestos-containing materials.

How is Asbestos Bad for Our Health?

The International Agency on Research for Cancer lists all forms of asbestos as “carcinogenic to humans.” A carcinogen is defined as any substance or agent that tends to produce a cancer. The reason this mineral is a carcinogen is because of the effects its fibers have on human lungs. Asbestos is made up of extremely small fibers that are naked to the human eye. These fibers can become airborne and stay suspended in the air. When they are breathed in, the fibers can make it past our bodies’ natural defenses and get lodged into the tissue of our lungs. When this occurs, scar tissue begins to form, which reduces the function of our lungs. It eventually progresses to disability and death. Mesothelioma is a common deadly illness caused by exposure to these fibers. Sometimes the effects are not realized for decades after the exposure.

Best Practices for Working Around Asbestos

Become familiar with what building products asbestos is found in and what it looks like. Knowing what to look for is important in order to avoid disturbing these materials. There are many materials in our workplaces that still contain asbestos to this day, but it is

relatively harmless until it is disturbed in a way that creates airborne fibers. Smashing, breaking up, cutting, or grinding materials that may have asbestos in them should never be done. Creating dust through sweeping is another task that should be avoided if it is thought any of the dust is from materials that contain asbestos.

Any asbestos-containing materials that are beginning to break down or flake need to be properly sealed or abated by professionals.

Summary

While much of the occupational exposure to asbestos in developed countries has decreased, there is still exposure all across the world to this carcinogen.

Cases of mesothelioma are still being diagnosed in the United States today due to exposure decades ago.

Protect yourself by not disturbing any materials that could possibly have asbestos in them.