

Mesothelioma – A Product of Asbestos

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Saturday, 08 July 2006
Last Updated Sunday, 30 July 2006

That's a name that strikes fear into the hearts of many in today's modern world and yet as recently as 50 years ago Mesothelioma was almost completely unknown outside of a small group of medical practitioners. Today it's a word that is frequently heard on the television news as little people battle big multi-national companies for compensation for the dreadful disease that they now face.

Mesothelioma is also known in some parts of the world as Asbestosis because the disease only comes from exposure to asbestos fibers. It doesn't have to be prolonged exposure and you aren't safe from it just because you have never worked in the asbestos industry either.

Just one single fiber is enough to trigger the disease and more and more people who have never been near an asbestos mine or worked near an asbestos processing plant are succumbing to the disease.

Certainly the disease is most prevalent, and almost guaranteed, in anyone who has either worked at an asbestos mine or in a factory where asbestos related items were manufactured. The families of those people are also affected because fibers from the mine or the plant invariably came home on the clothes and in the hair of the workers.

Many wives of asbestos workers have contracted the disease after being exposed to those fibers while washing their husband's work clothes. Children have been similarly exposed and many years later begin to display the symptoms in of Mesothelioma and subsequently succumb to the disease.

But the disease is not just confined to the workers and families of workers in asbestos mines and associated plants. Mesothelioma has appeared in growing numbers in the general population. That is because for many years asbestos was a commonly used ingredient in a variety of building materials and it was also used in insulation.

Fibro – a common building material used in homes in the period from 1940 through to the late 1960's and beyond – contained a high level of asbestos. Fibro was used for roofs and walls in houses and public buildings. Many schools here in Queensland, where I live, have contaminated fibro roofing and huge numbers of houses were built around the world with that same material.

Asbestos was also used in material used for insulation. That insulation went into wall cavities in houses, around steam lines in naval ships and even in lagging around the boilers on steam locomotives.

Initially many of the places that it was used were quite safe. The building material was stable and unless it was broken the asbestos remained undisturbed. However, age has led to a deterioration in the fibro and the insulation and as the material has deteriorated asbestos fibers have been disturbed and are found in the air.

In other instances house renovations have uncovered the insulation that has contained asbestos and that has released the fibers into the air. There is a case in record here in Queensland of a teacher who contracted Mesothelioma after being exposed to asbestos particles and fibers as they settled on the school desks from a deteriorating fibro roof. She ultimately passed away but now all the children that she taught are facing a very uncertain future.

The sad fact is that today, and for many years into the future, the world is going to be living with Mesothelioma and it is going to begin appearing in people who have perhaps never even known that they had come into contact with asbestos or asbestos related products.