

Why is asbestos dangerous?

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- Asbestos still kills around 5000 workers each year, this is more than the number of people killed on the road.
- Around 20 tradesman die each week as a result of past exposure
- However, asbestos is not just a problem of the past. It can be present today in any building built or refurbished before the year 2000.

When materials that contain asbestos are disturbed or damaged, fibres are released into the air. When these fibres are inhaled they can cause serious diseases. These diseases will not affect you immediately; they often take a long time to develop, but once diagnosed, it is often too late to do anything. This is why it is important that you protect yourself now.

Asbestos can cause the following fatal and serious diseases:

Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a cancer which affects the lining of the lungs (pleura) and the lining surrounding the lower digestive tract (peritoneum). It is almost exclusively related to asbestos exposure and by the time it is diagnosed, it is almost always fatal.

Asbestos-related lung cancer

Asbestos-related lung cancer is the same as (looks the same as) lung cancer caused by smoking and other causes. It is estimated that there is around one lung cancer for every mesothelioma death.

Asbestosis

Asbestosis is a serious scarring condition of the lung that normally occurs after heavy exposure to asbestos over many years. This condition can cause progressive shortness of breath, and in severe cases can be fatal.

Pleural thickening

Pleural thickening is generally a problem that happens after heavy asbestos exposure. The lining of the lung (pleura) thickens and swells. If this gets worse, the lung itself can be squeezed, and can cause shortness of breath and discomfort in the chest.

Note: It is also important to remember that people who smoke, and are also exposed to asbestos fibres, are at a much greater risk of developing lung cancer.

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