



Asbestos Fact Sheet

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name of a group of highly fibrous minerals with separable long, thin fibers. Separated asbestos fibers are strong enough and flexible enough to be spun and woven. Asbestos fibers are heat resistant, making them useful for many industrial purposes.

How are employees exposed to asbestos?

We are all exposed to low levels of asbestos in the air; however, employees may be exposed to asbestos during the manufacture of asbestos-containing products, when performing brake and clutch repairs, when disturbing asbestos-containing materials during the renovation or demolition of buildings, and when renovating or demolishing ships constructed with asbestos-containing materials. Custodial workers may be exposed through contact with deteriorating asbestos-containing materials in buildings.

Occupations where workers may be exposed to asbestos include:

- Asbestos removal workers
- Demolition and renovation workers
- Auto mechanics
- Boiler workers or inspectors
- Bricklayers
- Building inspectors
- Carpenters
- Drywallers
- Electricians
- Floor covering manufacturers or installers
- Furnace workers
- Grinders
- Insulators
- Iron workers
- Laborers
- Maintenance workers
- Millwrights
- Operating engineers
- Painters
- Plasterers
- Plumbers
- Roofers

How does asbestos exposure affect me?

The inhalation of asbestos fibers can cause serious diseases of the lungs—such as asbestosis and mesothelioma—and other organs. Asbestosis can cause scar-like tissue to form in the lungs and can result in loss of lung function, disability and death. Tobacco smokers who have been exposed to asbestos have a greater risk for lung cancer than do nonsmokers who have been exposed. Most cases of lung cancer or asbestosis in asbestos workers occur 15 or more years after initial exposure to asbestos. The time between diagnosis of mesothelioma and the time of initial occupational exposure to asbestos commonly has been 30 years or more.



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What should I do to protect myself?

Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be used to prevent or minimize exposure. Gloves, boots, Tyvek suits, eye protection and other PPE may be necessary. Additionally, respiratory protection may be needed if exposure levels exceed the limits set in the asbestos standard. Employees must practice good personal hygiene, such as removing PPE and washing their hands and face prior to eating, smoking or applying cosmetics.

Are there occupational safety and health standards for asbestos?

Yes, the following are standards OSH has adopted for asbestos:

- **29 CFR 1910.1001** – general industry
- **29 CFR 1915.1001** – maritime industry
- **29 CFR 1926.1101** – construction industry

Where can I find additional information?

Please review our [Asbestos Subject Index](#) page.