By the Numbers – Asbestos

DID YOU KNOW?

All types of asbestos cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, cancer of the larynx and ovary, and asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs). Exposure to asbestos occurs through inhalation of fibres in air in the working environment, ambient air in the vicinity of point sources such as factories handling asbestos, or indoor air in housing and buildings containing friable (crumbly) asbestos materials.

In-depth research studies examined the effects asbestos had on workers as well as others contaminated by second-hand asbestos exposure. These studies compiled many alarming statistics.

Asbestos is a generic term for a group of 6 silicate minerals having similar but distinct properties. There are two main asbestos classifications – serpentine and amphibole asbestos fibers. Chrysotile, or white asbestos, is the only serpentine fiber.

Statistically, chrysotile held approximately 90-95% of the entire asbestos market share.

The amphibole class was composed of amosite, crocidolite, tremolite, anthophyllite, and actinolite asbestos fibers. Amphibole fibers were more dangerous to human health than the serpentine chrysotile class.

However, exposure to every type of asbestos fiber posed a high risk for humans to develop respiratory diseases like asbestosis and mesothelioma.

Overwhelming evidence supports statistics proving the amount of exposure, the exposure duration or time length, and the specific asbestos fiber type had a cumulative effect on the chance a worker developed asbestos-related diseases.

While there has been a fall in asbestos production throughout the world, certain countries – including the U.S. – have significantly increased importation of asbestos. Asbestos lobbying organizations play a major role in keeping asbestos trade alive.

- Global asbestos production fell from 2.1 million tons in 2012 to 1.4 million tons in 2015.
- In 2018, the U.S. chemical industry quadrupled its importation of asbestos compared to the year before.
- A 2018 study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health reported that for every 20 tons of asbestos produced and consumed a person dies of an asbestos-related disease somewhere in the world.
- More than 2 million tons of asbestos is currently consumed each year throughout the world.

Asbestos Exposure Studies

Exposure studies reveal a lot about the health effects of asbestos including who may be at risk of developing an asbestos-related disease. These exposure studies focus on specific types of asbestos work. They uncovered how much exposure translates into cases of disease among the workers.

For example, insulators are among the most studied population of asbestos workers because exposure levels were high in this field of work. Studying asbestos insulators tells us a lot about what can happen when a person is exposed to high levels of asbestos for years…