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VERDICT

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Special Asbestos Issue

Mesothelioma

Lung Cancer

Asbestosis

Who is at Risk?



VERDICT

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What is _____ Asbestos



Asbestos is a word used to describe a group of fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the earth. These minerals are long, thin fibers widely used in manufactured goods because of their ability to be woven, high tensile strength, insulating properties and resistance to heat and most chemicals.¹

North American mining of asbestos minerals and its commercial use began in the 1800's and by 1950, the United States was the world's largest user of asbestos. Since then, manufacturers have used asbestos in products such as roofing materials, thermal and electrical insulation, cement pipe and sheets, flooring, gaskets, coatings, plastics, textiles, paper and friction products such as automobile clutch, brake and transmission parts.²

Regulation of asbestos use started in the 1970's with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) banning its use in several applications,

such as gas fireplaces, where product use could release asbestos into the environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned all new uses for asbestos in 1989 and its use has declined, but because the EPA still allows uses established prior to that date asbestos products are still manufactured and in use today.³

Asbestos mining, manufacturing of asbestos products and deterioration or disturbing of an asbestos products in some way, such as during construction or demolition, releases asbestos mineral fibers into the environment.⁴ The human eye cannot see these fibers because they are so small. When a person inhales these asbestos fibers, they lodge in the lungs and remain there throughout the person's life. High concentrations of asbestos, long duration and frequency of asbestos exposure increase the probability of asbestos-related health conditions.⁵ ●

What Health Conditions Does Asbestos Cause?

Asbestos and all commercial forms of asbestos are human carcinogens, cancer causing.⁶ Health conditions including mesothelioma, lung cancer, asbestosis, pleural plaque and pleural effusion can develop from exposure to asbestos. These conditions take a long time to develop and can continue to progress even after stopping the exposure. Most cases of asbestosis or lung cancer diagnosed in people exposed to asbestos on the job were 15 years or more after first exposure. Most cases of mesothelioma diagnosed are 30 years or more after first exposure.⁷

Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a tumor starting in the mesothelium, the cells lining the inside of the chest, abdomen, area around the heart and the outside of most internal organs such as the lungs. These tumors may be benign (non-cancerous) or cancerous, called malignant mesothelioma but often shortened to just mesothelioma as is done here.⁸

Mesothelioma usually develops first in the lungs, but can also start in the abdomen or other organs.⁹ The most common form is pleural mesothelioma, starting in the chest cavity, which is responsible for 75% of all mesotheliomas. Peritoneal mesotheliomas that begin in the abdomen account for most of the remaining cases. Extremely rare forms of the disease are pericardial mesothelioma, which starts in the cavity around the heart, and mesotheliomas of the tunica vaginalis, starting in the covering layer of the testicles.¹⁰

Symptoms of mesothelioma may include abdominal bloating and/or pain, chest pain, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath and weight loss. A doctor uses methods such as a chest x-ray, laboratory examination of the fluid surrounding the lungs called pleural fluid, lung biopsy, pleural biopsy and computed tomography (CT) scan of the chest and upper abdomen to diagnose mesothelioma.¹¹

If your doctor diagnoses you with mesothelioma, he or she may recommend surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy or a combination of these treatments. Your doctor may also prescribe medicines to prevent fluid buildup, ease pain, prevent lung infections or relieve other complications of your disease.¹²



Lung Cancer

Asbestos is a known carcinogen and can cause other cancers besides mesothelioma, such as lung cancer.¹³ There are different types of lung cancer, identified by how the cancer cells look under a microscope. About 87% of lung cancers are a type called non-small cell lung cancer. The other 13% are small cell lung cancer, which tends to spread more quickly than non-small cell lung cancer.¹⁴

Early stages of lung cancer cause no symptoms. As the cancer grows, a person

may experience symptoms such as a persistent cough, cough that gets worse over time or a cough expelling blood, trouble breathing or shortness of breath, constant chest pain, hoarse voice, tiredness, unexplained weight loss and frequent respiratory infections.¹⁵

A doctor suspecting a patient may have lung cancer or who's patient complains of these symptoms should first review medical and occupational history and perform a physical exam to check for signs of illness. Blood test, chest x-ray and/or computed tomography (CT) scan may also be ordered. However, the only

way to confirm the presence of lung cancer is for a pathologist to identify cancer cells in a collected sample using a microscope. A doctor uses procedures such as sputum cytology, thoracentesis, bronchoscopy, fine-needle aspiration, thoracoscopy, thoracotomy or mediastinoscopy to collect samples of fluid, cells or tissue for laboratory analysis by a pathologist.¹⁶

Because lung cancer treatment depends upon the stage, meaning the kind, size and if the cancer has spread or metastasized, doctors must know this before developing a treatment plan. Staging the cancer may involve blood or other tests, computed tomography (CT) scan, bone scan, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan or positron emission tomography (PET) scan.¹⁷

If your doctors diagnose you with lung cancer, they may advise surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy or a combination of these in a treatment plan developed to fight your particular cancer case.¹⁸

Asbestosis

When asbestos fibers lodge in the lungs, they can cause a respiratory disease called asbestosis. It causes fibrosis, or scar tissue, to develop inside the lungs. This inhibits lung expansion, preventing oxygen absorption into the blood and removal of carbon dioxide from the body.¹⁹

Asbestosis is also known by the names fibrotic lung disease, pneumoconiosis and interstitial pulmonary fibrosis.²⁰

Symptoms of asbestosis may include chest pain, cough, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, nail abnormalities and clubbing of the fingers.²¹ In addition to reviewing the patient's detailed medical history and occupational history for asbestos exposure, doctors may use diagnostic tools such as a chest x-ray, pulmonary function test, computed tomography (CT) scan or bronchoscopy in the diagnosis of asbestosis.²²

There is no cure for asbestosis and no treatment to reverse the effects of asbestos in the lungs. The goal of treatment is to stop the disease from progressing, alleviate symptoms and prevent complications.²³ The first step is to cease the asbestos exposure. Because smoking increases the risk of developing this disease, cancers and undermines

treatment benefits, it is important to stop smoking. Your doctor may prescribe medications to alleviate your symptoms, perform procedures remove secretions from the lungs or oxygen therapy. Certain asbestosis patients may require lung transplantation.²⁴

Pleural Disorders

Asbestos exposure can cause changes or disorders in the thin layer of tissue covering of the outside of the lungs and interior of the chest cavity, called the pleura.²⁵

One condition called pleural plaque, characterized by the thickening or hardening of the pleura, usually causes no symptoms.²⁶

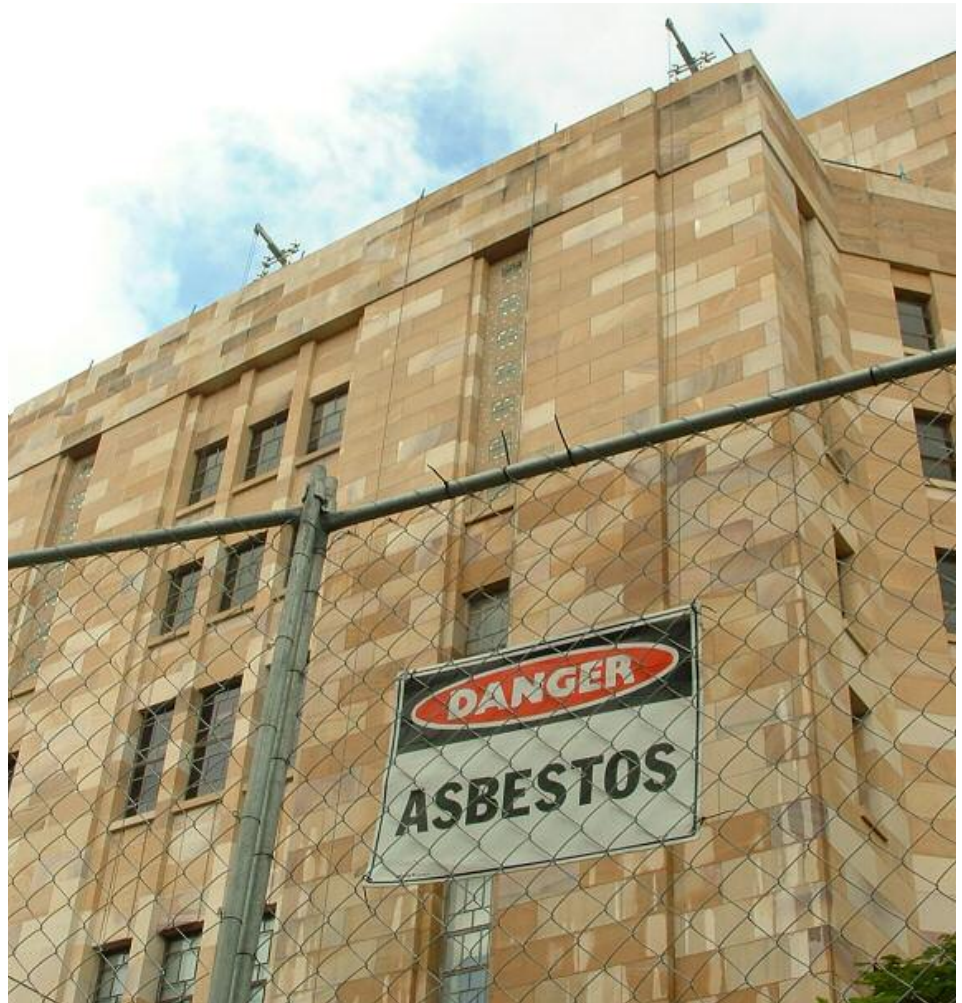
Another condition, a type of pleural effusion called exudative effusion, occurs when fluid accumulates between the layers of pleura lining the lungs and chest cavity. This is a result of leaky blood vessels caused by inflammation, irritation and swelling of the pleura.

Excess fluid surrounding the lung for a long time can cause the lung to collapse. This fluid can turn into an abscess, or empyema, if infected.²⁷

Symptoms of pleural effusion may include a sharp chest pain that is worse when coughing or taking deep breaths, cough, fever, hiccups, rapid breathing and shortness of breath. Sometimes there are no symptoms at all.²⁸

To diagnose pleural effusion, a doctor will use a stethoscope to listen to a patient's breathing and for a dull sound when tapping the chest. Other tests to confirm diagnosis include chest x-ray, laboratory examination of the fluid surrounding the lungs called pleural fluid, thoracic CT scan or ultrasound of the chest.²⁹

If your doctor diagnoses you with pleural effusion, treatment of the condition may involve the removal of the fluid using a chest tube or the use of medication to prevent fluid build-up. Treating the underlying cause of the pleural effusion, such as asbestosis or lung cancer, is essential.³⁰ ●



Who is at Risk for _____

Asbestos

Related Health Conditions?



A Those at risk of developing asbestos related health conditions include anyone employed in mining, milling, manufacture or installation of asbestos products before the late 1970's government regulation of asbestos exposure in the workplace, including miners, aircraft and auto mechanics, building engineers and construction workers, electricians, shipyard workers, boiler operators and railroad workers.³¹

Despite regulations, workers today still suffer from asbestos exposure in occupations that use products made of asbestos such as asbestos insulation workers and brake repair and maintenance workers, or workers who encounter

asbestos during building demolition or asbestos removal and abatement.³²

Workers may bring asbestos home on their clothing, shoes and bodies. Significantly elevated amounts of asbestos have been found in the lungs of family members and those living in the same household as workers exposed to asbestos in the workplace, in levels often as high as the exposed worker had.³³

People who live or work near asbestos-containing waste sites or asbestos-related industries and those who live or work in buildings with deteriorating asbestos insulation or that have undergone poorly performed asbestos removal are at risk.³⁴

People can also suffer asbestos exposure from demolition or renovation of buildings containing asbestos and industries or activities such as excavation that disturb naturally occurring asbestos in the environment.³⁵

Fire insulation in the North Tower of the World Trade Center was comprised of asbestos, which entered the environment as part of the particulate matter or dust from the building's destruction on September 11, 2001. People involved in the initial rescue and recovery, those who worked to clear ground zero and persons who cleaned WTC dust from area buildings are at risk for asbestos related health conditions. The families and those who shared a household with these workers are at risk because asbestos could have entered their home on the workers clothes, shoes and body of the worker. Also at risk are people who lived or worked near the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, especially the 3,000 children who resided within 1 km of the towers and the 5,500 who attended school there.³⁶

If your doctor has diagnosed your health condition as mesothelioma, lung cancer, asbestosis, pleural plaque or pleural effusion caused by asbestos exposure, or a loved one has been diagnosed or died from one of these diseases, you need the services of an asbestos lawyer or mesothelioma lawyer. You may be entitled to compensation for medical expenses, lost wages, pain and suffering, or the loss of support and funeral expenses for the wrongful death of a loved one. Call Napoli Bern Ripka, LLP at 888-529-4669 today. ●



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