

Used in a wide variety of building materials and consumer products, asbestos is now classified as a known carcinogen by every major health organization around the world, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The illness most closely linked to asbestos exposure is mesothelioma – an aggressive form of cancer that often forms in the membranes around the lungs.

To understand the severity of the problem and the complex legal issues involved, it is helpful to review some history and statistics. However, it is important to remember that asbestos-related mesothelioma isn't just numbers or factoids – asbestos exposure has sickened and [killed](#) thousands upon thousands of American workers, including those here in North Carolina. If you have been diagnosed with mesothelioma or some other asbestos-related illness, a [North Carolina asbestos lawyer from Martin & Jones](#) can help you find a way forward for you and your family.

## An Overview of the History of Asbestos and Mesothelioma

### Asbestos

Asbestos is a generic name for six different silicate minerals that are found in every country in the world. These minerals have fibers that are resistant to heat, corrosion, and electricity, making them extraordinarily useful in a wide variety of products, especially in the construction and manufacturing industries. It can be added to cement, plastic, cloth, and other materials to make them stronger and act as an insulator against heat and electricity.

Unfortunately, asbestos is toxic when inhaled or ingested, particularly as a result of prolonged exposure. The asbestos fibers become trapped in the body causing inflammation, scarring, and eventually cellular damage that can lead to cancer and other illnesses.

Asbestos products began being produced on a massive scale in the early 20th century and continued to be produced until the 1980s. Production peaked in 1973, with the United States processing more than 804,000 tons of asbestos. More than 25 other countries were involved in the production of asbestos, processing a global total of 4.8 million metric tons of asbestos ore during the 1970s.

# Establishing a Link Between Asbestos Exposure and Mesothelioma

The connection between mesothelioma and asbestos exposure was first raised in 1935 by Steven R. Gloyne, a British Pathologist. Other studies followed, but it wasn't until several decades later that asbestos producers and other industries were willing to admit there was a link between asbestos exposure and this deadly cancer. These industries were willing to admit that it was a dangerous material only when faced with overwhelming evidence and after losing in court when [legal claims](#) had been brought against them.

Accordingly, mesothelioma cases peaked in the time period during the 1970s to the 1990s. Since that time, they have begun to decline due to the fact that the use of asbestos is more controlled because we now recognize the link between asbestos exposure and mesothelioma. Nonetheless, people continue to be diagnosed with mesothelioma caused by past asbestos exposure. If you or a family member is worried about past asbestos exposure, a North Carolina asbestos lawyer can help you understand your rights.

## Mesothelioma Statistics: A Chilling Picture

Starting in 1999, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been tracking the number of asbestos-related deaths and illnesses. While mesothelioma is a relatively rare form of cancer, the CDC confirmed that more than 18,000 Americans had already died as a result of long-term asbestos exposure as of 2005. The CDC forecasted that almost 30,000 more people will die between then and 2027 due to asbestos-related illnesses, an average of almost 1,300 deaths each year nationwide.

The number of asbestos-related deaths is expected to decline due to the restrictions that were put in place in the 1980s. Asbestos-related illnesses and deaths are very real, especially for those who have worked in environments where they had long-term exposure to asbestos. Additional statistics paint an even more somber picture:

- Each year, between 2,500 and 3,000 people are diagnosed with mesothelioma.
- 27 million Americans were exposed to asbestos between 1940 and 1980.
- 1.3 million Americans continue to be exposed to asbestos in the workplace.
- It is estimated that approximately 43,000 people died between 1979 and 2001 from mesothelioma and asbestos-related illnesses in the United States.

Mesothelioma has a latency period of 20 to 50 years from the initial exposure. As a result, people who were exposed decades ago are still being diagnosed today. If you worked in an environment that required long-term exposure to

asbestos, it is vital that you get routine medical examinations. If you have been diagnosed with mesothelioma or some other asbestos-related illness, your next phone call should be to a North Carolina asbestos lawyer.

## Mesothelioma is Deadly

While medical treatment continues to improve, the sad reality is that a mesothelioma diagnosis is usually fatal. One reason is that most diagnoses are made the cancer is advanced and therefore difficult to treat. The following statistics emphasize just how deadly the disease:

- Only 5 percent of people diagnosed with mesothelioma live five years after being diagnosed
- Only 10 percent live for 3 years after being diagnosed
- Only 20 percent live for 2 years after being diagnosed
- Only 40 percent live for more than 1 year after being diagnosed

To put those statistics in context, 60 percent of the people diagnosed with mesothelioma will die within the first year following their diagnosis. For those who have been diagnosed or have a loved one who has been diagnosed, you need to consider the financial implications this illness will have on your family. A North Carolina asbestos lawyer can help you understand what options are available and help you navigate the process.

## Who Is at Risk?

Statistics suggest that men are 4.6 times more likely to be diagnosed with asbestos-related mesothelioma than women and that women tend to survive 3 times longer. Men over the age of 60 are 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with mesothelioma than men who are 40 years old, likely because of its unusually long latency period.

Not everyone who is exposed to asbestos will develop an asbestos-related illness. It is estimated that the number of people who will become ill due to asbestos exposure is only 10 percent. Workers in the following industries have an increased risk of developing an asbestos-related illness:

1. [Shipyard workers](#)
2. Paper mill workers
3. Steel mill employees
4. Construction workers

5. Railroad workers
6. Carpenters and millwrights
7. Oil refinery workers
8. Drywall workers
9. Pipefitters and plumbers
10. [Military personnel](#)

While the use of asbestos is now strictly controlled, it is important to remember that many workers are still exposed to asbestos on a daily basis. OSHA currently limits exposure to 0.1 asbestos fibers per cubic centimeter of air.

Unfortunately, some employers will intentionally or negligently fail to comply with OSHA guidelines by not properly ventilating workspaces or providing workers with appropriate personal protective equipment such as respirators. A North Carolina asbestos lawyer can hold your employer accountable if you have contracted an asbestos-related illness due to their failure to meet OSHA standards.

## Talk to a North Carolina Asbestos Lawyer at Martin & Jones Today

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with an asbestos-related illness, the lawyers at Martin & Jones can help you get the compensation you need to take care of your family. [Contact us](#) today to schedule a free consultation with a compassionate North Carolina asbestos lawyer who can help you successfully navigate the claims process.