

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING E-UPDATE

Inadvertent Exposure to Asbestos Staff/Student Information Sheet | December 02, 2015

What is asbestos and how does it become disturbed?

Asbestos is the fibrous form of mineral silicates belonging to the serpentine and amphibole groups of minerals. Loose fibre broken down from the mined rock is used in the manufacture of numerous products. Asbestos is invariably mixed with another material and is rarely encountered in its raw form, making it hard to identify.

Material containing asbestos unfortunately has been used in a variety of building and insulation material and was very prevalent before 1990. Asbestos comes in different forms bonded into other materials and is not usually handled as a raw product. When not disturbed e.g. cut, sanded, grinded to create a fine dust or not in a deteriorated state the material is stable and does not pose significant harm to people.

However, like all material, it is subject to the rigors of time and can deteriorate, and sometimes it is not readily identified while being worked on by maintenance personnel. Thus, dust and fibres can be created, resulting in potential inadvertent exposure.

Although the type of asbestos may be known, there will often be little if any reliable information concerning the level and duration of exposure.

Health, Monitoring of Exposure

There are three different types of diseases that can potentially result from exposure;

1. asbestosis or fibrosis (scarring) of the lungs,
2. lung cancer; and
3. mesothelioma, a cancer of the inner lining of the chest wall or abdominal cavity.

High exposure for long periods is linked more clearly to these diseases. However, it is possible that repeated low-level exposures may lead to asbestos-related diseases. There is usually a long delay (15 – 60 years) between first exposure to asbestos and the first symptoms of disease.

People who may have been exposed to asbestos are understandably anxious and concerned about the possible effects on their health.

In many cases exposure will have been minimal, with little likelihood of any long-term ill-effects. However, there will often be *little if any reliable information about the level and duration of exposure.*

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING E-UPDATE

There are also *no generally available techniques for determining individual lung burdens* of asbestos fibres. Although chest X-rays can be done in certain circumstances, they do not identify exposure to fibres. Lung function spirometry testing (blowing into a peak flow meter) is also not needed, as it will not pick up asbestos-related diseases after minimal exposure.

There is also *no effective post-exposure treatment* for the effects of inhaled asbestos fibres, although in smokers the risk of asbestos-induced lung cancer can be reduced by stopping smoking.

What can I do?

If you have received or believed that you have received exposure to asbestos material, it is recommended that you;

1. Inform your manager or academic contact and complete the Asbestos Exposure Registration Form (see below). Send a copy to WorkSafe New Zealand and the University's Health Safety and Wellbeing Service,
2. Discuss with Health Safety and Wellbeing Service next actions to take,
3. If you are a smoker, you are strongly encouraged to give up,
4. **Importantly**, live your life as normal!

Doctor appointment and baseline chest X-ray

If you are concerned or feel you would like to have a consultation with your doctor please contact the Health Safety and Wellbeing Service (+64 9 923 4896 ext. **84896** or hsw@auckland.ac.nz) prior to making an appointment. They will note your details and ensure that you have the right information to provide to the doctor. The University will reimburse the costs for an initial doctor's consultation and if needed a chest x-ray.

Counselling and additional support

You may choose or be referred for counselling and additional support. The University offers 24 hour support through the Employee Assistance Programme **EAPServices: 0800 327 669**. Students can contact the University Health and Counselling Service (+64 9 923 7681 or uhsinfo@auckland.ac.nz). With the assistance of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service a more specialist occupational health service provider can be selected for this purpose.

Asbestos Exposure Register

WorkSafe NZ administers the Asbestos Exposure Register which records all data related to a person's exposure. This can be referred to in the future should there be a need. Once the registration form is completed and submitted you will receive confirmation from WorkSafe that your details are recorded. You will also receive an additional letter that you need to pass onto your Doctor so that this can be placed on your medical files. You can obtain this form from WorkSafe NZ [Asbestos Exposure Registration](#)

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING E-UPDATE



Where can I get further information?

You can contact University HSW Managers for guidance and advice:

+64 9 923 4896 ext. **84896** or hsw@auckland.ac.nz

You are entitled to see related environmental monitoring test results and these will be provided with explanations, via the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service, and can also be obtained on request.

The following websites contain extensive information on Asbestos:

[WorkSafe NZ Asbestos Information](#)

[Health and Safety Executive UK Asbestos Information](#)

If you have any concerns please discuss with manager, health and safety representative and Health, Safety Wellbeing Service for advice and guidance.