

Macmillan information on Asbestos and Mesothelioma



Briefing for: **Mick Antoniw AM**
Purpose: **Provide an overview of the link between Asbestos and Mesothelioma**
Date created: **May 2012**

Introduction – Factors and causes of Mesothelioma

Asbestos is the most common cause of mesothelioma. Up to **9 out of 10** cases of mesothelioma are caused by exposure to asbestos fibres. Occasionally, mesothelioma develops in people who have never been exposed to asbestos. The other causes of the disease are not fully understood, but in rare cases mesothelioma has been linked to exposure to radiation.

Key statistics¹

- Every year around **2,400 people** are diagnosed with mesothelioma.
- Mesothelioma is around five times more common in men than in women. In 2008 there were almost 2,000 cases in men and over 400 in women.
- Around 9 out of 10 mesothelioma cases occur in people aged 60 and over.
- Mesothelioma incidence rates have increased almost four-fold since the early 1980s.
- The incidence of mesothelioma is expected to peak around 2020 and to decline rapidly thereafter
- Overall, mesothelioma has a poor prognosis. By the time someone has symptoms and goes to their doctor, the disease is very often advanced.
- One-year **survival rates** for mesothelioma for **men is 34%** and women **40%**.
- Around **2,300** people died from mesothelioma in the UK in 2009.
- The Health and Safety Executive estimates that around **500,000** non-domestic buildings in the UK are likely to contain asbestos.
- Only buildings built after 2000 are unlikely to contain asbestos.

Wales Figures²

Number of deaths where asbestosis or mesothelioma was the underlying cause of death, in Wales and the United Kingdom, 2005-10.

Area	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Wales	6	5	7	1	13	8
Pneumoconiosis due to asbestos						

and other mineral fibres						
Wales	73	76	87	96	103	95
Mesothelioma						
UK	141	145	144	147	217	194
Pneumoconiosis due to asbestos and other mineral fibres						
UK	1,934	2,005	2,032	2,160	2,293	2,291
Mesothelioma						

Asbestos

Asbestos is a natural mineral found in many countries. Asbestos is a mineral not naturally found in UK soil. All diseases caused by asbestos are the result of imported asbestos. Asbestos acts as an insulator (to keep heat in and cold out); it has good fire protection and it protects against corrosion.

There are three main types of asbestos: blue asbestos (crocidolite), brown asbestos (amosite) and white asbestos (chrysotile). Asbestos was commonly used in UK industries until the ban on imports of blue and brown asbestos in the 1980s. The use of all types of asbestos was banned in 1999.

Exposure to asbestos

People most likely to have been exposed to asbestos at work include:

- joiners and construction workers;
- plumbers;
- electricians;
- boilermakers; and
- shipbuilders.

Minimal casual exposure can result in mesothelioma.

These jobs were mostly done by men. Mesothelioma is five times more common in men than in women. People who have not worked directly with asbestos can also sometimes develop mesothelioma. These include:

- Family members of people who've worked with asbestos and brought the dust home on their clothes;
- People who lived near asbestos factories; and
- People who worked in buildings containing asbestos materials, which were disturbed or damaged.

The link between asbestos and lung disease

Mesothelioma doesn't usually develop until many years after exposure to asbestos. It can take any time from 10–60 years, although the average is about 30–40 years after exposure.

Managing Asbestos

Under Regulation 4 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 and Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012, there is a duty to ensure that asbestos is managed properly in non-domestic premises.

Evidence from the Health and Safety Executive highlights that the Regulations are not always being followed. Between November 2010 and July 2011 the HSE³ carried out a series of inspections of schools outside local authority control to determine their standards of asbestos management. The inspections resulted in enforcement action being taken. The level of enforcement is high and shows that a significant number of schools outside local authority are failing to manage their asbestos safely.

In February 2012 The Health and Safety Executive launched a campaign to encourage trades people to deliver free hours of asbestos awareness training.

The impact on public Health

The following websites clearly highlight the impact asbestos has on public health.

- [The Human Face of an Asbestos Epidemic](#)⁴
- [NHS E Learning for Health view Professor Kieran Sweeney](#)⁵
- [Asbestos in Schools website](#)⁶

More information around Mesothelioma can be found on Macmillan Cancer Support website⁷

Contact

For further information please contact Gwenllian Griffiths, External Affairs Manager, Wales Macmillan Cancer Support.

07793 579375 / 01656 867973

GGriffiths@macmillan.org.uk

¹ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/mesothelioma/index.htm>

² <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2012-04-24b.105339.h>

³ HSE Enforcement Action for Failure to Manage Asbestos in Non-LA Schools
<http://www.asbestosexposureschools.co.uk/pdfnewslinks/HSE%20ENFORCEMENT%20SUMMARY%20%20NOV%2010%20to%20Jul%2011.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpJ2se23Xy4>

⁵ http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/projects/lead/patient_journey.html

⁶ <http://www.asbestosexposureschools.co.uk>

⁷ <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Cancertypes/Mesothelioma/Mesothelioma.aspx>