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**Asbestos and Cancer**

**By Karen Brown**

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If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with mesothelioma or another asbestos related cancer, you may want to seek legal advice. Typical legal settlements can reach five million dollars.

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer in which malignant (cancerous) cells are found in the mesothelium, a protective sac that covers most of the body's internal organs. Most people who develop mesothelioma have worked on jobs where they inhaled asbestos particles.

What is the mesothelium?

The mesothelium is a membrane that covers and protects most of the internal organs of the body. It is composed of two layers of cells: One layer immediately surrounds the organ; the other forms a sac around it. The mesothelium produces a lubricating fluid that is released between these layers, allowing moving organs (such as the beating heart and the expanding and contracting lungs) to glide easily against adjacent structures.

The mesothelium has different names, depending on its location in the body. The peritoneum is the mesothelial tissue that covers most of the organs in the abdominal cavity. The pleura is the membrane that surrounds the lungs and lines the wall of the chest cavity. The pericardium covers and protects the heart. The mesothelial tissue surrounding the male internal reproductive organs is called the tunica vaginalis testis. The tunica serosa uteri covers the internal reproductive organs in women.

What is mesothelioma?

Mesothelioma (cancer of the mesothelium) is a disease in which cells of the mesothelium become abnormal and divide without control or order. They can invade and damage nearby tissues and organs. Cancer cells can also metastasize (spread) from their original site to other parts of the body. Most cases of mesothelioma begin in the pleura or peritoneum.

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How common is mesothelioma?

Although reported incidence rates have increased in the past 20 years, mesothelioma is still a relatively rare cancer. About 2,000 new cases of mesothelioma are diagnosed in the United States each year. Mesothelioma occurs more often in men than in women and risk increases with age, but this disease can appear in either men or women at any age.

What are the risk factors for mesothelioma?

Working with asbestos is the major risk factor for mesothelioma. A history of asbestos exposure at work is reported in about 70 percent to 80 percent of all cases. However, mesothelioma has been reported in some individuals without any known exposure to asbestos.

Asbestos is the name of a group of minerals that occur naturally as masses of strong, flexible fibers that can be separated into thin threads and woven. Asbestos has been widely used in many industrial products, including cement, brake linings, roof shingles, flooring products, textiles, and insulation. If tiny asbestos particles float in the air, especially during the manufacturing process, they may be inhaled or swallowed, and can cause serious health problems. In addition to mesothelioma, exposure to asbestos increases the risk of lung cancer, asbestosis (a noncancerous, chronic lung ailment), and other cancers, such as those of the larynx and kidney.

Smoking does not appear to increase the risk of mesothelioma. However, the combination of smoking and asbestos exposure significantly increases a person's risk of developing cancer of the air passageways in the lung.

Karen Brown

### **The Proposed Asbestos Bill – A Bagful Of Controversies**

**By Kirsten Hawkins**

The proposed asbestos bill seeks to compensate asbestos exposure victims by setting up a trust fund, grant immunity to businesses by out of court system and resolve pending cases. The asbestos bill is expected to cover past cases and clear the courts.

However, at a gathering of premier asbestos specialists in September 2004, no one believed that the asbestos epidemic was over. Many new cases are expected, as the symptoms are slow to develop and this is the reason why many organizations are raising voices against the validity and effectiveness of the proposed asbestos bill. Research has proved that inhalation of asbestos, a common industrial material, has caused serious diseases including asbestosis and mesothelioma – a malignant cancer.

What Is The Asbestos Bill? Since the mid-1970s, The United States Congress is attempting to pass the Asbestos Bill to ensure adequate compensation to victims of asbestos exposure. Asbestos related diseases were first highlighted during the passage of the Black Lung Bill. In 1999, the Supreme Court

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left it to the Congress to pass the asbestos bill ensuring the rights of asbestos exposure victims.

Milestones in Asbestos Bill Here are some milestones in the passage of asbestos bill.

1999– The Fairness in Asbestos Compensation Act was the Asbestos Bill proposed to form a government body responsible for resolution of asbestos lawsuits out of the court system.

2000– The Asbestos Compensation Act–this asbestos bill attempted to establish an Office of Asbestos Compensation and a Compensation Fund for asbestos victims based on medical criteria. This asbestos bill was sponsored by Sen. Orin Hatch. 2003– The Asbestos Claims Criteria and Compensation Act failed to become a law when the organizations criticized it as being limited to cover the compensation requirements of asbestos victims.

2004– The Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act proposed a creation of \$124 billion trust fund. This asbestos bill also criticized as being limited.

What holds up the Asbestos Bill? Two major obstacles holding up the Asbestos Bill are the size of the trust fund and the criteria defining the victims who can have access to the fund. The people opposing this asbestos bills believe that the trust fund would be inadequate to provide adequate compensation to the asbestos victims. Secondly they believe that the proposed asbestos bill deprive the asbestos victims of their natural right to file lawsuits for compensation.

Kirsten Hawkins is a asbestos and mesothelioma specialist from Nashville, TN. Visit

for information on asbestos reform, mesothelioma lawsuit news, and

more.

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