

Cancer of the Lung and Other Sites

Cancer of the lung and other sites, specifically the gastrointestinal tract and the larynx is the third type of disease associated with asbestos exposure.

The suspicion of an association between asbestosis and lung cancer was first published in 1935, but convincing evidence of such an association did not appear until 1955. As late as 1960 a standard textbook on occupational medicine stated: "Some authorities believe that asbestos may induce bronchogenic carcinoma, but as yet there is no impressive body of evidence to support this assumption."

In the middle sixties Selikoff investigated the mortality experience of insulation workers and concluded that the death rate from cancer of the bronchus and pleura was 6.8 times as high as that for the general United States white male population and cancer of the stomach, colon, and rectum was three times as common. Cases of mesotheliomas and asbestosis were also found in this group. The lung cancer risk in this group was dose related. Some increase in lung cancer was seen in workers with less than 3 months exposure. An increase in cancer incidence was seen as little as 10-14 years from the onset of work exposure, but the greatest increase occurred 30-45 years from the onset of the work exposure. When cigarette smoking was taken into account, it was also calculated that asbestos insulation workers with a history of regular cigarette smoking had eight times the risk of lung cancer deaths compared with cigarette smokers who did not do such work, and approximately 90 times the risk of men who neither worked with asbestos nor smoked cigarettes.