

Asbestos - 6

Only 120 cases of mesothelioma of the pleura and peritoneum were reported in the National Cancer Institute's Third National Cancer Survey of 1969-71, compared to 24,049 cases of lung cancer. The nine areas surveyed represented approximately 10 percent of the United States population. There is some indication from recent scientific reports that mesothelioma is becoming a more common diagnosis.

16. How is mesothelioma detected and diagnosed?

The most common first symptom may be shortness of breath or pain in the wall of the chest which is aggravated by deep breathing, or abdominal pain, which may vary from vague discomfort to severe spasms, sometimes located in the upper right region of the abdomen. Occasionally, this pain is accompanied by a need to urinate or defecate. Although chest X-ray is of some help in diagnosing mesothelioma when it occurs in the lining of the lung, precise diagnosis of this unusual cancer is difficult and requires an exploratory operation of the chest or abdomen, depending on the patient's symptoms, to provide tissue for microscopic examination.

17. If a worker currently is exposed to asbestos, what can he do to protect himself?

He can take steps to make sure his employer is aware of and following the asbestos exposure and related industrial exposures regulations of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). First, he can request a copy of the Standard on Worker Exposure to Asbestos from the Office of Information, OSHA, Washington, D.C. 20210 or from regional offices in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Kansas City (Mo.), Dallas, Denver, San Francisco and Seattle.

After studying the standard, a worker may wish to discuss apparent shortcomings with his employer or union representative to try to get them corrected. He also may initiate a complaint of workplace hazards with OSHA for investigation.

A booklet, Good Practices Manual for Insulation Installers, also is available and may be ordered from the Clearinghouse for Occupational Safety and Health Information, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.* This publication describes recommended procedures for working with asbestos.

Recommended practices for demolition operations have been published by the EPA. "Sprayed Asbestos-Containing Materials in Buildings: A Guidance Document" is available from the Standards Development Branch, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27711.

*Address is in question #4.