9. How is it used?

Asbestos has about 3,000 different uses, with about two-thirds being used in the construction industry in building products, insulation, friction materials and textiles. Manufactured products have included reinforced asbestos cement sheets and pipes, patching and taping compounds, floor and ceiling tiles, as well as paints, coatings and sealants containing asbestos as reinforcing fillers, pipe linings and fillers for various liquids.

Friction products include clutch facings and brake linings for automobiles, railroad cars, airplanes, and industrial machinery. A variety of other uses are known, including theatre curtains, fireproof "blankets," filtration materials, and until recently, artificial ashes in false fireplaces and dry-wall patching compounds.

Once incorporated into manufactured items, the hazard resulting from asbestos is less serious, as long as the substance is not disrupted in any way. However, the fibers are nearly indestructible. A potential health risk arises whenever asbestos fibers are set free, resulting in asbestos dust.

10. How has asbestos been used in shipyards?

Asbestos has been used extensively in shipyards to cover pipes and surfaces in new construction, repair and refitting. Major sources of exposure to asbestos in shipyards have been in fabrication of asbestos materials (such as pipe-coverings), their installation, and their removal during repair and refitting work.

Asbestos has been included in insulation materials such as boards, mattresses, and cloth for engines, hulls, and decks; covering of ventilation and water pipes; coatings for cables and electric wires; wall boards and tiles; and putties, caulks, paints, joint fillers, and cement products. It may also be present in construction materials such as gaskets, rings, tape, tubing, twine, webbing, washers and coated electric wires.

Asbestos exposure in shipbuilding probably is now far less than it was in the past, due largely to improvements in engineering and industrial hygiene methods and the introduction of other insulation materials into construction.

11. What are the signs and symptoms of asbestosis?

Asbestosis is a chronic lung disease whose signs and symptoms result from permanent changes in lung tissue due to asbestos exposure. The earliest and most prominent sign is shortness of breath on exertion.