

CBS Evening News - July 15, 1976

CHARLES COLLINGWOOD: Consumers Union and the Natural Resources Defense Council today asked the government to ban spackling or other wall patching compounds which contain asbestos.

The groups charge that the products give off asbestos fibers which when inhaled increase the risks of lung cancer for millions of people.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
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### *Wall-Repair Goods Are Said to Contain Carcinogenic Fibers*

Some Patching Compounds  
Have Perilous Asbestos,  
Studies Say; Ban Asked

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON—Some of the compounds used for patching and repairing interior walls contain cancer-causing asbestos fibers and should be banned, two public-interest organizations contended.

In a petition to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Consumers Union estimated that between a third and a half of the patching compounds sold in the U.S. would be subject to such a ban. It cited products sold by Mohil Corp.'s Montgomery Ward Inc. subsidiary and by Georgia-Pacific Corp. as among those that allegedly pose a health hazard.

When asbestos fibers are inhaled, they greatly increase the danger of cancer of the lungs, the lining of the lungs and the abdomen. The petition cited medical studies showing very high concentrations of the fibers in the air after asbestos-containing compounds were used for dry wall repairs. Asbestos gets into the air both when powdered compounds are mixed with water to create a patching paste and when patched places are sanded after the paste dries, the studies showed.

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# 20 sensible questions you asked about Asbestos and health. And the answers.

## 1 What are the risks of my getting an Asbestos disease?

The risks are almost always confined to those who worked extensively with asbestos some years ago - before present safety regulations were introduced.

Asbestos only becomes dangerous when the dust is breathed in excessive amounts generally over a long period.

It can damage the lungs and interfere with breathing; this is a disease called asbestosis which can lead to a greater risk of developing lung cancer particularly when associated with heavy smoking.

Some people may develop a rare cancer called mesothelioma. Of all the cancer deaths in the country only 0.14% are due to this disease, which can develop without any link with asbestos.

Where there is a link it is mainly associated with blue asbestos fibre, which is no longer imported.

Most asbestos related diseases are the result of high exposure to asbestos dust in working conditions which are no longer allowed by law.

## 2 How long do Asbestos diseases take to develop?

Most asbestos cases are diagnosed 15-20 years after first exposure.

Mesothelioma has developed between 15 and 50 years after exposure to dangerous amounts of asbestos dust.

People suffering from asbestos diseases today were thus almost always exposed many years ago to working conditions which are no longer allowed.

## 3 Is it just the dust that's dangerous?

Yes. Asbestos-containing products in themselves are perfectly harmless.

The only risk is when fibres are released in quantity, for instance by intensive cutting or abrasion.

## 4 What are the advantages, if any, of asbestos?

Asbestos combines several vital properties in one economic substance.

It resists fire, heat and corrosion; it's strong and long lasting, even though it is extremely light and flexible.

As a reinforcement it gives these properties to other materials e.g. in brake linings it withstands the heat generated by braking.

## 5 How can I recognise Asbestos products in my home?

It isn't always easy. Asbestos fibres are usually mixed with other materials - such as cement and various resins - which seal them in, but can make them hard to recognise.

Because asbestos resists fire and heat it's used in insulation board, ironing board stands and oven door seals.

Asbestos cement sheeting is weatherproof, too, so it's often used to roof garden sheds and garages. And asbestos is used in your car brake and clutch linings. In the past it was sometimes used to lag tanks and pipes.

## 6 What is the Blue Asbestos I've heard about?

Blue asbestos fibre (crocidolite) is a rare form of asbestos that's exceptionally strong and acid resistant.

It is in some instances considered more dangerous than white asbestos, and has not been imported since 1970. Before that it was used for sprayed insulation and pipe lagging.

## 7 Are there any tests that detect Asbestos dust in the air we breathe?

Yes. Tests for detecting dust in the atmosphere are carried out regularly by the asbestos industry, through the Asbestos Research Council, other research organisations and public authorities.

The results indicate no health hazard to the general public.

## 8 Is there Asbestos dust in the air from car brakes?

Asbestos combined with various fibres is used in car brakes for efficient stopping power, strength and heat-resistance.

Only 1% of the tiny amount of brake dust released is asbestos and asbestos levels in traffic are usually a million times lower than the level allowed in factories.

## 9 Is the asbestos on my ironing board dangerous?

No. The only asbestos in your ironing board is in the stand for the iron at the end.

Hard iron stands (the sort found on most modern ironing boards) present no hazard as they do not wear out. Some older ones were made of a softer material, however, and may fray.

The amount of dust released should not be dangerous, but obviously, it is sensible to replace a worn stand.

## 10 My husband is a do-it-yourself fan. What should he know about Asbestos?

The asbestos industry has produced a leaflet for the home handyman which gives simple do and don't rules about working with asbestos products.

By the end of the year, most asbestos products in the shops will carry a special symbol.

At the bottom of this page, you'll find the Asbestos Safety Code.

Why not cut it out and keep it handy?

## 11 What should I tell my children about Asbestos?

There's no need to alarm them, simply tell them that like petrol, gas and electricity, asbestos does a great deal of good - for example in fire protection.

But like petrol, gas and electricity, it can be dangerous if not used properly.

## 12 Are older people more likely to get Asbestos diseases?

No. Age itself does not appear to affect anyone's susceptibility to asbestos-related diseases.

Some older people may have been exposed to asbestos dust at work, before the present safety legislation came into force.

## 13 What should I do if I think I have an Asbestos disease?

There are many causes for breathing difficulties.

However, if you think you have been heavily exposed to asbestos dust more than fifteen years ago, and you have trouble with your breathing, you should consult your doctor.

## 14 Can Asbestos cause skin cancer?

No.

## 15 What if I swallow Asbestos?

There is no evidence that swallowing a small amount of asbestos fibre has ever done anyone any harm.

## 16 Can I catch Asbestos diseases from someone else?

No. They are neither contagious nor infectious.

## 17 How should I dispose of Asbestos?

For industry, there are special regulations for asbestos waste disposal.

If you work on asbestos products at home, damp any dust you may make immediately, and seal it in a plastic bag for disposal.

## 18 What can I use in place of Asbestos?

Glass fibre, rock fibre and mineral wool may be used for some insulation products.

However, asbestos is indispensable for many applications. And for many others, it is the cheapest and most efficient material.

## 19 Why has there been no Government statement about the dangers of Asbestos?

There have in fact been several Government statements on asbestos and health over the last 50 years. Legislation controlling asbestos factories was introduced in 1931. More comprehensive asbestos regulations came into force in 1970.

This year an Asbestos Advisory Committee was set up by the Secretary of State for Employment, this committee is reviewing the health risks for workers with asbestos products and for the general public to see if any further protection is needed.

## 20 Can Asbestos be used safely?

Yes. Any risk comes from careless working on asbestos products which can cause you to breathe too much asbestos dust.

So read the Safety Code below. And if you have any further queries, please send us the coupon. Our address is:

The Asbestos Information Committee, PO Box 405, London W14 4QS.

## The Asbestos Safety Code

Avoid creating asbestos dust.  
Avoid breathing asbestos dust.

### AT HOME

1. **Damp the work** if you think you are likely to make a lot of dust; wet dust does not become airborne and is not inhaled.

2. **Damp any dust** that falls to the floor and pick it up as soon as possible. Place it in a plastic bag and seal the bag.

3. **Work in a well ventilated space**, if possible outdoors, when sawing, drilling, filing or sanding.

4. **Use hand saws and drills** where possible, these produce less dust than power tools.

5. **Renew worn or frayed asbestos insulators** like oven door seals, hot plate cover seals, drying blands and summering pads.

**AT WORK:** If your day-to-day job involves asbestos, you should already have been issued with instructions and, if necessary, appropriate safety equipment.

**ALWAYS FOLLOW THE SAFETY PROCEDURES.**

To: The Asbestos Information Committee, PO Box 405, London W14 4QS.

Please send me further information on asbestos and health.  
(If you have a particular query, please print it in the space below.)

My query \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

**The Asbestos  
Information Committee**

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