

ASBESTOS
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Labor Department Study Foresees Asbestos-Linked Cancer Death Peak in 1990

A recently released study by the Department of Labor says that the cancer deaths attributed to exposure to asbestos in the 1940s and 1950s will peak in 1990, with an estimated 9,700 excess cancer deaths. The total deaths by 1999 is expected to be 200,000, around 2 percent of total cancer deaths.

The study, "Disability Compensation for Asbestos-Associated Diseases in the U.S.," estimated that 8,200 excess deaths from cancers linked to exposure occur each year, based on an examination of 1,150 asbestos workers who died between 1967 and 1975. Lung cancer and mesothelioma claimed some 1,000 of these workers; the balance died of asbestosis.

Schweiker Rejects 1978 Workplace Cancer Estimate

Health and Human Services Secretary Richard Schweiker said that current estimates for workplace-linked cancer deaths are lower than 20% of all cancer deaths as estimated by government scientists in 1978. In a letter to the Asbestos Information Association, Schweiker said that current estimates vary from 5% to 15%, and that asbestos-related cancers are now estimated at 1% to 3% of cancer mortality. The AIA, an employers' group, urged Schweiker to withdraw the earlier estimate from OSHA's record before the agency considers changes in the carcinogen policy. While acknowledging that the 1978 estimates were high, Schweiker still cautioned that "...the current state of knowledge does not allow us to give a precise estimate; responsible scientists simply do not agree on a single estimate of cancers caused by or contributed to by environmental factors, or on the contribution of asbestos in particular."

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