

asbestos insulators who smoke have a lung cancer risk over fifty times higher than nonsmokers without asbestos exposure. However, stopping smoking greatly reduces this risk, even if a person has smoked for many years. Smokers who have been exposed to asbestos should be especially encouraged to stop smoking. The extent of risk of lung cancer among mechanics is not now known; but, given the known lung cancer risk among other groups exposed to asbestos, caution is necessary. 3. Other Cancers Other cancers which appear to be caused by asbestos include cancer of the voice box and of the stomach and large intestine.

Latency Period

It usually takes 15 to 30 years or more for cancer or asbestos lung scarring to show up after exposure. (Scientists call this the latency period.) Until then, the victim often feels fine. This gives a false sense of security. For example, if one touches a hot stove, one gets burned right away. With asbestos, the damage isn't obvious until many years later. This false sense of security can easily lead a worker and/or supervisor to follow work practices which can cause harmful exposures, since they are not aware that disease may develop later.

III. MEDICAL TESTS

Medical tests only discover asbestos-related disease after it has developed. In some cases, where the condition may be curable, especially with asbestos-related cancers of the large intestine and voice box, early detection can be very important.

Asbestosis

Asbestosis, or lung scarring from asbestos, is permanent and cannot be treated. It is diagnosed by chest x-rays, breathing tests (called lung or pulmonary function tests), and/or listening to the lungs, together with a history of exposure to asbestos. Very early asbestosis may be missed by these techniques. Early asbestosis is difficult to see on a chest x-ray and is best evaluated by a doctor who has experience and/or specialized training with asbestosis. (This type of specialist is called a "B reader" of x-rays.)

Lung Cancer

Very often lung cancer from asbestos has already spread by the time it can be seen on a chest x-ray or by tests of the phlegm. This is why more frequent tests for lung cancer do not help the average person who develops this cancer to live longer. Lung cancer is thus a condition needing prevention more than early detection and cure.

Intestinal Cancer

Cancer of the large intestine can often be detected early by yearly exams of the rectum and sigmoid area, with a hemoccult test for blood in the stool. Early detection and treatment of this condition can result in cure.

Voice Box Cancer

Voice box cancer can often be discovered at a curable stage by a medical exam. It may show up as hoarseness that does not go away in a few weeks.

IV. EXTENT OF EXPOSURE DURING BRAKE AND CLUTCH MAINTENANCE

Using a compressed air hose to clean drum brakes can release up to 16 million asbestos fibers in the cubic meter of air around a mechanic's face.¹ Even hitting a brake drum with a hammer can release over a million asbestos fibers. Much less dust from asbestos-lined disc brake pads will settle on disc brakes, but some dust can get on a mechanic's hands and into the garage air during maintenance. The asbestos fibers released from brake and clutch work can be scattered throughout a garage, where they can present a hazard for months or years.

Because of this, many garages are now turning to newer methods for brake cleaning. However, some of these newer