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Asbestos exposure

by Dave Barker

The Department of Veterans Affairs has stated there are currently 25 million Americans who have served in the armed forces of the United States. Possible millions of these American veterans were exposed to toxic asbestos during their military or naval service. Asbestos was used by every military branch. Asbestos was highly regarded for its heat resistance and fireproofing capabilities. Asbestos was so valued that the military and Navy mandated widespread usage before it was phased out during the 1970's.

Most used the asbestos products for insulation purposes, as than 300 products containing asbestos were used by primarily by the Navy from the 1930's through the 1970's. Every ship and shipyard built by the Navy before the mid-70's was fitted with numerous asbestos containing materials. To a lesser degree the Army and Air Force used asbestos.

What were the levels of risk for asbestos exposure on our Naval vessels? In a word, high! The asbestos products were extensively used in engine and boiler rooms and other areas below deck for fire safety purposes. Navy personnel who worked below deck were heavily exposed to asbestos, but all sailors are at risk, as this deadly compound was used in navigation rooms, sleeping quarters, and mess halls, as decks and pipe coverings all contained asbestos.

It must be understood, no portion of a Naval ship was asbestos free between the 1930's and mid 1970's, making Navy veterans and shipyard workers one of the most at risk groups for developing asbestos related diseases. I have had clients who were told by the VA rating specialists that other than engineering rates were not exposed, that is simply not true. In multiple cases I have shown where deck rates wore asbestos gloves when their duty was hot shellman on the gun mounts, or asbestos suits on damage control duties.

Of all occupations exposed to asbestos, veterans account for 30% of all mesothelioma cancer patients. Thus more than 30% of Americans suffering with mesothelioma (a cancer of the internal lining of the lungs, abdomen, and heart) were exposed to asbestos during their military or naval service.

Veterans who served between up to the 1970's have a great risk of developing asbestosis, cancer and other related disease. Navy personnel and workers employed in shipyards through the 1970's hold a great possibility of developing a disease caused by asbestos exposure.

Veterans with an asbestos related illness should contact a veteran's service officer and file their claims. It is important you select a VSO who will think outside of the VA box, especially on these type conditions.

The veteran must provide proof that their disease is asbestos related and that exposure occurred during military service. The burden of proof is always on the veteran, in this case, due to mind sets, the proof is difficult even though it is totally obvious.

The Department of Veteran Affairs recognizes asbestos as well as mesothelioma as a service connected disability.

Even when diagnosed with mesothelioma which all cases are caused by asbestos exposure, the VA does not consider is a presumptive, nor always approve the claim for disability compensation. The veteran must provide evidence the mesothelioma 'is as likely as not' to have been caused by exposure to asbestos while in service.

Diagnosis of asbestos related diseases is difficult as many symptoms are identical with other disorders. Symptoms range from respiratory problems as well as chest pain, thus asbestos related conditions are frequently misdiagnosed. This causes the condition to spread. Similar pleural mesothelioma a common form of asbestos cancers, has symptoms such as a chronic cough, night sweats, and fever, which are frequently misdiagnosed as pneumonia or the flu. As a result the cancer becomes active and spreads.

Mesothelioma treatment is available at the VAMC. VA physicians and clinicians are specialty trained. The local VA may have to send the veterans to another facility, but they will make sure the condition is monitored and treated properly.

You may find valuable information on my website:

<http://davebarker.portalone.us/>