

Mesothelioma in Europe

(article by Rachel Jones)

Mesothelioma is a type of cancer that involves tumors infecting the lining of the organs in the abdomen and lungs of the body. As a result of asbestos exposure, Europe along with a number of other countries has been hit hard by cases of this disease. This is primarily because of asbestos use throughout the 20th century. This asbestos exposure involves inhalation and often the fibers will become lodged into the lungs, damaging cells and causing infection regularly.

This disease is especially dangerous because of its long latency period. Often, decades will pass between the original asbestos exposure and the onslaught of symptoms, sometimes even lasting half a century. Following this latency period, some of the common symptoms are often confused with elderly age and regular health problems. Coughing, shortness of breath, weight loss, and fatigue are all regular examples of mesothelioma symptoms. The earlier the diagnosis, the better, considering that mesothelioma life expectancy is usually severe. The average life expectancy following a diagnosis is between eight and 14 months.

The current state of asbestos in Europe (2010-2011)

The last 10 years have been perhaps the most productive in the European Union's effort in having the use of this dangerous fiber put to an end. In a landmark piece of legislation back in 2005, the European Union put a total ban on asbestos use within their countries. Unfortunately, there has been some controversy throughout the past ten years as well. Back in 1999, when the EU started their asbestos plan, there was a somewhat derogation on asbestos that included allowance of the use of chrysotile asbestos in some situations for a temporary time period. This time period was supposed to run out in 2008, but some in the European Commission were attempting to extend this derogation period. They were challenged as asbestos support groups introduced a declaration that condemned any attempts at further asbestos use. Unfortunately this derogation has remained intact today as it was passed through under suspicious circumstances.

There still remain some inconsistencies throughout the 25 EU Member States. The inability to

enforce some of the EU directives is still a major concern as some companies still hide their use. Diagnosis and treatment have also been considered subpar in the EU countries.

Despite the ban six years ago, asbestos-contaminated materials can still be found in public buildings, trains, ships, and some products in Europe. A 2010 plan from the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers outlined a way to address present concerns. The group spoke of a multifaceted plan that would investigate safety training, working conditions, and detection of asbestos. The plan was also mapped out to include disease cases and the connected compensation. The EFBWW is trying to outline a coordinated schedule with the EU and the member countries to help meet their goal of having asbestos completely out of EU countries by 2023.

Mesothelioma's impact on Europe today

As previously mentioned, there are certainly still cases of asbestos exposure going on in Europe today, but much of the impact on today's world is a result of prior asbestos exposure. The long latency period of mesothelioma has made the early 21st century the highest in mesothelioma related deaths. Older studies had originally outlined 2011-2015 as a peak period in deaths from mesothelioma, but this outlook has shifted somewhat. The UK is looking towards somewhat of a plateau throughout the next decade for mesothelioma deaths. They reached 2249 in 2008 and that number is expected to hover around the same level until 2016 (expected numbers are around 2156), then drop.

Given the latency period, mesothelioma related deaths are sure to continue on for at least the first half of the 21st century in Europe. Recent predictions have outlined as much as 60,000 deaths predicted in UK alone, between 2011 and 2050. The asbestos ban of 2005 and current initiatives to rid EU countries totally of asbestos will only continue to cut down on future cases and deaths related to mesothelioma, especially in the second half of the 21st century.

While the overall rate of mesothelioma is still rising in Europe, some European countries have shown a decline in the number of people becoming diagnosed each year. The ban on the use of asbestos in various European countries has largely impacted the projected peak year for mesothelioma cases in Europe. The ban of asbestos exists since a number of years under SOLAS and a total ban came into effect as of January 1st 2011.