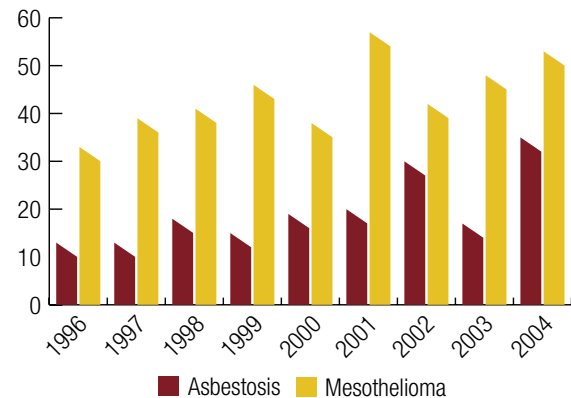


What are the figures for Northern Ireland?

Deaths Caused or Contributed to by Asbestos-Related Diseases in Northern Ireland



Year	96	97	98	99	00	01	02*	03†	04~
Asbestosis	13	13	18	15	19	20	30	17	35
Mesothelioma	33	39	41	46	38	57	42	48	53

Source: EMAS NI.
 * 2002: also 2 deaths due to asbestos-related lung disease.
 † 2003: mesothelioma and asbestosis co-existed in 2 deaths.
 ~ 2004: mesothelioma and asbestosis co-existed in 1 death.

The peak of asbestos exposure in Great Britain is thought to have been around the mid-to late 1960s. The annual number of mesothelioma deaths is predicted to continue to rise until it reaches an estimated peak of between 1950 and 2450 deaths some time between 2011 and 2015, because of the long latency period.

Additionally, the legacy of the past means that many buildings which are used on a daily basis still contain asbestos materials. This includes domestic as well as commercial and public buildings.

What is being done? – managing the legacy

All work activity involving disturbance of asbestos containing material is strictly governed by regulations. There are Codes of Practice and guidance which describe the most effective ways of dealing with asbestos. Work with asbestos insulation and soft insulation board must be done by a licensed contractor. All work with asbestos material is covered by the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations.

Those people now considered to be most at risk of exposure to asbestos dust are those working in the building sector, where employees may inadvertently disturb asbestos. This is why it is important that full information is available before any work is undertaken on buildings.

Owners of non-domestic properties must assess the risks of any asbestos materials in their buildings and prepare a plan to manage it – removal of the asbestos is not always the best option. They must also inform anyone intending to carry out work on the building that asbestos is present and that appropriate precautions must be taken.

Risks of low-level or occasional exposures

Many people have genuine concerns for their health following an accidental exposure to asbestos dust, if they have worked in a building where asbestos was present or if they discover that they have asbestos in their home. The best, peer-reviewed, scientific information available is that the risks of contracting an asbestos disease is related to the duration and severity of exposure. Risks from a single exposure or from longer term exposure at low levels are assessed as insignificant.

The Asbestos Advisory Service aims to provide independent, accurate information and best-practice guidance on matters related to work with asbestos. It is intended to be a single point of reference primarily for the householder seeking guidance on dealing with asbestos in the home.



For further information contact:
 The Asbestos Advisory Service
 Health & Safety Executive NI
 83 Ladas Drive
 Belfast BT6 9FR
 Freephone: 0800 0320 121
 Email: asbestos@detini.gsi.gov.uk

Or visit www.hseni.gov.uk and click onto the Asbestos Advisory Service link.

Asbestos, the facts

Bringing you information and guidance on dealing with asbestos



Facts about asbestos

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals with a range of useful properties, including heat resistance and strength. For these reasons it was widely used in a large number of products and applications.

Mineral Name	Common Name
Chrysotile	White
Crocidolite	Blue
Amosite	Brown (sometimes called grey)

Most common types of asbestos

Asbestos deposits are found all over the world, with the main commercial mines in South Africa, South America, Canada, Europe, Australia and Russia.



Uses of asbestos

Asbestos was widely used in industry in the twentieth century. It was used in shipbuilding, in power stations, and extensively in the building industry where asbestos cement products (corrugated roofing, pipes); thermal insulation and fire proofing were widely employed. It has also been used as

- an additive in paints and sealants,
- in textiles such as felts and theatre curtains,
- in gaskets, and
- in friction products like brake linings and clutches.

Although the new use of asbestos is banned, it can still be found in many buildings including libraries, hospitals, schools and homes.

The problem with asbestos

Asbestos fibres consist of bundles of very fine fibres known as 'fibrils'.



Where airborne asbestos dust is breathed in, some of these fibrils can get through the body's natural defences against dust and penetrate into the deep

lung, where they may lead eventually to disease. The link between asbestos and respiratory disease was recognised early in the 20th century and by the 1960's was widely known.

What diseases does asbestos cause?

Asbestos disease is caused by breathing in very fine fibres. As asbestos fibres accumulate in the lungs, several types of disease may occur.

- **Asbestosis** is a scarring of the lung tissue. This scarring impairs the elasticity of the lung and hampers its ability to bring oxygen to the blood. Asbestosis causes severe breathing difficulties.
- **Mesothelioma** is cancer of the lung or abdominal linings. Cases unrelated to asbestos exposure are rare.
- **Lung Cancer** is a malignant tumour of the lining of the bronchi. The tumour grows through surrounding tissue, invading and often blocking air passages. As with mesothelioma and asbestosis, the disease has a long latency period – typically 20-40 years. Lung cancer caused by asbestos exposure is clinically indistinguishable from lung cancers not associated with asbestos.
- **Pleural plaques.** This a non-malignant disease in which the lining of the lungs (pleura) becomes scarred. Small areas of scarring are called pleural plaques. It normally takes at least 15-20 years after the first exposure to develop. Pleural plaques do not normally cause impairment of lung function or associated disability.
- **Other effects.** A number of other non-fatal conditions have been associated with asbestos exposure.

Ingestion

Some concerns have been raised over asbestos in drinking water and food – arising, for example, from the use of asbestos cement pipes in the distribution system. The World Health Organisation has concluded that 'there is therefore no consistent, convincing evidence that ingested asbestos is hazardous to health'.



The asbestos legacy

Asbestos disease usually takes a long time to appear following first exposure. Many cases of asbestos-related diseases occurring nowadays are the result of massive exposures in industries which used asbestos extensively in the past, and where little or no attempt was made to control dust conditions.

Statistics

- There were 1862 deaths from mesothelioma in 2002 in Great Britain.
- It is estimated from statistical analysis that the number of asbestos related lung cancer deaths each year is approximately the same as the number of deaths from mesotheliomas.