



## **Asbestos: Top 7 Myths – and the Facts**

There are around 400 naturally occurring fibrous silicates in the world, some of which have proved extremely useful to man; one small group of these is collectively called asbestos. Early records indicate asbestos was used in the Pharaonic mummification process: its further use is noted - occasionally – throughout the ages...until the mid to late eighteenth century when there was a positive explosion in demand: this was the new age of Shipbuilding, Railways, and Electricity.

Engineers and manufacturers during the industrial revolution – a time of innovation and growth - used asbestos extensively for its high tensile strength and thermal properties: it had, quite literally, a thousand and one uses.

However, this wonder material - so cheap and readily available - is extremely harmful to health, and in many cases causes death. Asbestos although now generally banned in the western world does still exist and may be found in older properties and commercial premises. Today, many myths surround asbestos; untruths and misunderstanding, both of which instill fear in people: but what are the myths and what are the facts?

### **Myth:**

Asbestos is easy to recognise, you can tell what it is just by looking at it.

### **Fact:**

Not true;

Asbestos could be found in almost half a million different consumer products, engineering, and building materials from the early 1920's through 1978. Due to this, asbestos is not easy to recognise, and can only be confirmed by laboratory testing. Owners of older, period properties are advised to consider seriously this fact when planning major renovation works. Employers should consider testing in aged premises with regard to the Health and Safety at work act.

**Myth:** Asbestos related diseases are contagious and can be passed on.

### **Fact:**

This is untrue;

Asbestos related diseases are not contagious. They are caused by inhalation of asbestos fibres, and the body's reaction in trying to expel them. However, people who work around asbestos can transfer the harmful fibres on their clothing, and expose others in this manner.

**Myth:** The symptoms of asbestos related diseases appear immediately or soon after exposure.

**Fact:** Untrue;

An asbestos related disease can go undetected for many years, and the symptoms are not immediate. The body will battle to expel the fibrous invaders, the process irreparably damaging the linings of the lungs in the process. This latency period, after initial exposure, can be up to forty years.

**Myth:** One fibre can kill.

**Fact:** This is wrong;

Inhaling one asbestos fibre will not kill; this is a myth that's been around for many years. There are a number of different types - also naturally occurring – types of asbestos, and therefore fibres, all around us in our natural environment: mountains and rocks. We are constantly breathing in small quantities of asbestos fibres, just as we are constantly being bombarded by radiation...in small dosage.

**Myth:** Mesothelioma is always the result of being exposed to asbestos fibres.

**Fact:** Untrue;

Mesothelioma is an age old disease, around long before man began releasing large amounts of asbestos into the atmosphere. However, asbestos will greatly increase the risk of contracting mesothelioma: the more prolonged the exposure to asbestos, the greater the risk.

**Myth:**

White asbestos is not dangerous.

**Fact:** This is not true;

Although not as dangerous as brown and blue asbestos, white asbestos (chrysotile) is also classified as carcinogenetic and is harmful to health.

**Myth:**

It is safe to remove asbestos yourself as long as you wear a dust mask.

**Fact:** Not true;

Left undisturbed, where no airborne fibres are released into the atmosphere, asbestos is harmless: but start removing it, you run the very real risk of releasing minute fibres into the air which, if inhaled or swallowed can cause serious health problems.

Removal of asbestos without proper training, equipment, and the implementation of appropriate safety precautions may also cause asbestos fibre release. Asbestos-containing materials should only be handled by certified asbestos removal specialists.

Training provides greater awareness regarding the risks associated with asbestos and dispels a lot of the myths that have grown around it. The training of both management and personnel involved in the production and use of this material will improve mortality rates and lower the number of new cases of mesothelioma and other asbestos related diseases.

If you are suspicious and believe you may have asbestos on your property, or have asbestos you wish removed, or just want some further advice then contact one of our qualified advisors here at Toronto Asbestos Removal.