

Asbestos Hazards in the Mining Industry



Health Hazard Information Card HH-21

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the generic term for six fibrous mineral silicates: chrysotile, crocidolite, amosite, tremolite asbestos, anthophyllite asbestos, and actinolite asbestos.

How could I be exposed to asbestos?

- » The rock or ore being processed at the mine may contain asbestos, or
- » commercial products at the mine may contain asbestos.

Most miners in the United States are **not** at risk of exposure to asbestos; however, asbestos has been found at some mines, primarily talc, vermiculite, and asbestos mines.

How could I be exposed to asbestos in commercial products found at a mine?

Older buildings and equipment at mining operations may have asbestos-containing material, such as thermal insulation, fire-resistant construction materials, packing glands, and brake linings. If the material containing asbestos is damaged or disturbed in any way, the asbestos fibers can become airborne and pose a health threat.

Why is asbestos a health hazard?

Airborne asbestos fibers can be inhaled or swallowed and can cause asbestosis, lung cancer, mesothelioma, or cancers of the digestive system. These diseases can develop 15-40 years after exposure. Smoking, together with asbestos exposure, makes an individual extremely susceptible to lung cancer.

How can I limit asbestos exposure at work?

If the rock or ore you mine contains asbestos, follow proper clean-up and housekeeping measures to keep fibers from becoming airborne:

- » Use water to suppress the dust.
- » Wet sweep or use a vacuum with a high-efficiency filter that is specifically designed to capture asbestos fibers.

- » Never use compressed air, a shovel, dry sweeping or other dry clean-up method to remove asbestos from the work area.

Protective clothing that is disposable or has been appropriately cleaned should be provided each day. If not, then work clothes should be vacuumed using a specially-designed asbestos vacuum before being removed.

- » Respirators should not be taken off until any asbestos-contaminated clothing is removed.
- » Shower and changing facilities should be provided for miners to ensure that asbestos is not carried into employees' homes. **Don't take asbestos-contaminated clothing home with you.**

Will a respirator protect me from airborne asbestos?

When required, respiratory protection should be used as a supplement to effective engineering controls.

- » Respirators must be approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) as suitable for protection from asbestos fibers.
- » Miners required to wear respirators must be properly fit-tested and trained.
- » Mine operators must establish a formal respiratory protection program that complies with ANSI Z88.2-1969.

If asbestos is present, what training on the health hazards of asbestos should I have?

- » where asbestos is present in the work place;
- » what controls have been installed to minimize exposure, and how to use and maintain controls;
- » proper use of personal protective equipment; and
- » what to do if asbestos is accidentally released from materials containing asbestos.

Who can I contact for additional information?

If you have questions about any occupational health matter, feel free to contact your local MSHA office or MSHA's national Metal and Nonmetal health office at (202) 693-9640 or Coal health office at (202) 693-9515 or visit the MSHA homepage at www.msha.gov.

*U.S. Department of Labor
Mine Safety and Health Administration
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