

Government and Navy Knowledge Regarding Health Hazards of Asbestos: A State of The Science Evaluation (1900 To 1970).

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Abstract:

We evaluated dozens of published and unpublished documents describing the knowledge and awareness of both the scientific community and governmental entities, particularly the US Navy, regarding the health hazards associated with asbestos over time. We divided our analysis into specific blocks of time: 1900-1929, 1930-1959, and 1960-1970. By 1930, it was clear that high occupational exposure to asbestos caused a unique disease (asbestosis). Between about 1938 and 1965, a considerable amount of exposure and epidemiology data were collected by various scientific and government organizations. Between 1960 and 1970, mesothelioma was clearly linked to exposure to amphibole asbestos. Nonetheless, the Navy continued to require the use of asbestos-containing materials on ships, but also recommended that proper precautions be taken when handling asbestos. We concluded that the Navy was arguably one of the most knowledgeable organizations in the world regarding the health hazards of asbestos, and that it attempted to implement procedures that would minimize the opportunity for adverse effects on both servicemen and civilians. Finally, it is apparent from our research that through at least 1970, neither the military nor the private sector believed that the myriad of asbestos-containing products considered "encapsulated" (e.g. gaskets, brakes, Bakelite) posed a health hazard to those working with them.