

Statement by the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Regina Benjamin on National Asbestos Awareness Week 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, April 1, 2013

Contact: OASH Press Office
(202) 205-0143

During National Asbestos Awareness Week, April 1-7, I urge Americans to learn about the dangers of asbestos exposure.

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that occurs naturally in our environment; in rock and in soil. Because of its fiber strength and heat resistance, asbestos has traditionally been used in a variety of building construction materials, as insulation and as a fire retardant.

Activity that disturbs asbestos causes small asbestos fibers to float in the air. Inhaling these fibers leads to asbestos-related diseases. Three of the major health effects associated with asbestos exposure are lung cancer; mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer that is found in the thin lining of the lungs, chest, abdomen and heart; and asbestosis, a serious progressive, long-term, non-cancer disease of the lungs.

Anyone who disturbs asbestos is at risk. However, it is of special concern for construction, insulation, and demolition workers, pipefitters, boilermakers and others who might disturb asbestos found in old buildings or equipment as part of their work. The hazard is also very real to home handymen, first-responders, and community volunteers.

Preventing the damage caused by asbestos is important to help keep Americans healthy and safe in our homes. *Advancing Healthy Housing – A Strategy for Action* is a recent report released by several federal agencies that unifies federal action to advance healthy housing, demonstrating the connection between housing conditions and residents' health. It promotes strategies and methods intended to reduce in-home health hazards such as asbestos in a cost-effective manner.

The greater the exposure to asbestos, the greater the chance of developing harmful health effects.

If you think you have been exposed to asbestos, I encourage you to speak to your health care professional.

Together, we can prevent the dangers associated with asbestos. We can create healthier homes, healthier workplaces and a healthier America.

To learn more about asbestos and asbestos related diseases, please visit:

- <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asbestos/>
- <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>

To learn more about Healthy Housing and the Strategy for Action, please visit: <http://healthyhomes.hud.gov>