



# Asbestos

## Occupational Exposure Fact Sheet



### What is asbestos?

Asbestos is **a group of naturally occurring, fibrous silicate minerals.**

The **manufacturing and use of asbestos-containing products is severely restricted in most western countries**, including Canada, and it is banned in some countries.

Asbestos has historically been useful for many commercial applications because of its heat resistance, tensile strength, insulating and friction characteristics, as well as its ability to be woven. It is found primarily in roofing, thermal and electrical insulation, cement pipe and sheets, flooring, gaskets, friction materials, coatings, plastics, textiles, paper, and other products.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies asbestos as a **known carcinogen (IARC 1).**

### Occupational exposure to asbestos

Inhalation is the most important route of occupational exposure to asbestos.

Approximately 152,000 Canadians are exposed to asbestos at work.

Industries with the largest number of exposed workers in Canada include:

- **Specialty trade contractors** (82,000 people exposed)
- **Building construction** (52,000 exposed)
- **Automotive repair and maintenance** (4,300 exposed)

Occupations with the largest number of exposed workers include:

- **Carpenters** (34,000 exposed)
- **Construction trades helpers and labourers** (28,000 exposed)
- **Electricians** (16,000 exposed)

#### Exposure level

Occupational exposure to asbestos has changed over the past 40 years in Canada, making it challenging to assess exposure levels using historical data. Research on current exposure levels is ongoing.

### What are its health effects?

- **Mesothelioma** (a cancer of the protective lining of many internal organs)
- **Lung, laryngeal, and ovarian cancer**
- Asbestosis (scar tissue in the lungs)

### Where can you learn more?

- Visit our website at [www.carexcanada.ca](http://www.carexcanada.ca)
- Follow us on Twitter @CAREXCanada
- Email us at [info@carexcanada.ca](mailto:info@carexcanada.ca)