

Workplace Asbestos Exposure: Risks, Legal Options, and Finding the Right Help in Pennsylvania

For decades, asbestos was a common material in factories, shipyards, construction sites, and power plants. Many workers in Pennsylvania and across the country handled it daily without knowing the harm it could cause. The reality is that workplace asbestos exposure has led to serious illnesses like mesothelioma, lung cancer, and asbestosis. I have seen cases where a worker spent 30 years in a steel mill or a shipyard, and only after retirement did they receive a devastating diagnosis. The connection between their job and their illness is often clear, but proving it in court requires careful work.

How Asbestos Gets into the Body

Asbestos fibers are tiny and sharp. When disturbed, they float in the air and can be inhaled or swallowed. Once inside the body, they lodge in the lining of the lungs or abdomen. Over years, the fibers cause inflammation and scarring. This can lead to asbestosis, a chronic lung disease, or to mesothelioma, an aggressive cancer that affects the lining of the lungs, heart, or abdomen. The latency period is long. Someone exposed in the 1970s might not get a diagnosis until the 2010s or later. That delay makes it hard for people to connect their illness to an old job site. But it also means that many cases are still worth pursuing today.

MICHAEL SCHAFLE, ESQ.

PENNSYLVANIA MESOTHELIOMA LAWYER



Michael Schafle, Esq. - The Pennsylvania
Mesothelioma Lawyer

[Workplace asbestos exposure](#) is not limited to direct handling. I have spoken with widows whose husbands came home in dusty clothes. The fibers traveled on skin, hair, and coveralls. That is called secondary exposure or take-home exposure. It can cause the same diseases in family members. In Pennsylvania, the courts recognize this kind of harm, and claims can be brought by those who never set foot in a factory but were exposed through a loved one's work clothes. The key is proving the source of the asbestos and showing that the company knew or should have known the danger.

Industries and Jobs with High Risk

Some jobs carry a higher risk than others. In Pennsylvania, heavy industry has been a major part of the economy for generations. The following jobs have historically involved high levels of asbestos:

- Shipyard workers and Navy veterans who worked in engine rooms, boiler rooms, or insulation
- Construction trades such as pipefitters, electricians, insulators, and drywall installers
- Steel mill and refinery workers who handled equipment lined with asbestos

- Auto mechanics who worked on brakes and clutches containing asbestos
- Power plant and chemical plant operators who maintained boilers and pipes

Even workers who did not directly handle asbestos could be exposed if they worked near others who did. Occupational exposure is the most common route, but it is not the only one. Schools, hospitals, and old office buildings also contain asbestos. Maintenance workers, custodians, and teachers have filed claims after years of working in buildings with deteriorating insulation.

Medical Diagnosis and What Comes Next

Getting a proper diagnosis is crucial. Mesothelioma and asbestosis require specific imaging and sometimes a biopsy. A doctor will ask about work history. That is why it helps to keep old pay stubs, union records, or even a list of job sites. Many people do not think about this until it is too late. But a strong medical record combined with a clear work history can make a big difference in a claim.



Once a diagnosis is confirmed, the next step is understanding the legal options. A personal injury lawsuit can be filed against the companies that made or supplied the asbestos products. In some cases, the employer itself is responsible, but workers compensation often covers only part of the loss. For mesothelioma and other serious illnesses, a lawsuit can seek compensation for medical bills, lost income, pain and suffering, and other damages. If the patient has passed away, a wrongful death claim can be brought by the family.

Legal Challenges in Asbestos Cases

These cases are not simple. One major hurdle is the statute of limitations. In Pennsylvania, the clock usually starts running from the date of diagnosis, not the date of exposure. That gives people time to file a claim after they learn they are sick. But the window is limited. Missing it can bar a claim forever. Another challenge is product identification. Asbestos was used in hundreds of products, from pipe insulation to cement to brake pads. A lawyer must prove which specific product or products caused the exposure. That often requires digging through decades-old records, interviewing coworkers, and consulting experts.

Many asbestos companies have gone bankrupt. In their place, bankruptcy trusts were set up to pay claims. These trusts have specific deadlines and forms. A lawyer who knows the system can help navigate the trust process while also pursuing a lawsuit against other liable parties. Liability can fall on multiple companies. The key is to identify every possible source of exposure and every company that may have a legal responsibility.

Other Medical Conditions Linked to Asbestos

Besides mesothelioma and lung cancer, asbestos can cause pleural plaques, a scarring of the lining of the lungs that usually does not cause symptoms but can be a sign of exposure. Asbestosis itself can be debilitating, causing shortness of breath and a higher risk of infection. Some patients undergo brachytherapy, a form of radiation treatment, to slow the growth of tumors. Each condition has its own legal and medical details, but the common thread is the need for clear evidence of exposure.

Workplace asbestos exposure is not just a historical issue. In Pennsylvania, many older buildings, schools, and industrial sites still contain asbestos. Renovation or demolition can release fibers into the air. Workers in these jobs today face risk if proper safety measures are not followed. That is why awareness and legal protections remain important.

Finding the Right Legal Help

Not every law firm handles asbestos cases well. It takes experience with product identification, medical records, trust claims, and the specific laws in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia. A lawyer who focuses on mesothelioma cases will know which questions to ask and which experts to call. They will also understand the emotional weight of these cases. Many clients are facing a serious illness or grieving a loved one. The legal process should not add to that burden. A good lawyer explains each step clearly, handles the paperwork, and fights for fair compensation.



If you or someone you know has been affected by asbestos, do not wait. The statute of limitations is real, and evidence can disappear. Gather any records you can find: old pay stubs, union cards, employment letters, or even photos from work sites. Write down what you remember about the jobs you held and the products you used. Then speak with a lawyer who

has a track record in asbestos cases. They can tell you whether you have a claim and what it might be worth.

Asbestos litigation has been around for decades, but every case is unique. Some settle quickly. Others go to trial. The right lawyer will prepare for both outcomes. They will also know how to access bankruptcy trusts that hold money for victims. These trusts were set up so that even if the original company no longer exists, victims can still receive compensation.

Final Thoughts

The harm from workplace asbestos exposure can take decades to appear, but once it does, the impact is life-changing. In Pennsylvania, where industry has long been a backbone of the economy, many families are dealing with the consequences. The legal system offers a way to hold companies accountable and to get the financial support needed for treatment and care. It is not a quick or easy process, but it is one that can make a real difference. If you are facing a diagnosis of mesothelioma, lung cancer, or asbestosis, reach out to a lawyer who understands these cases. You do not have to go through it alone.