

Asbestos Hazards: Workers in the United States

Asbestos is a heat-resistant mineral that may be in fire-resistant and insulating materials. When workers inhale it, it can cause lung damage and diseases, like cancer. Managing exposure to asbestos is so important that the government regulates how to keep workers safe.

Regulations

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) are responsible for regulating environmental exposure and protecting workers from asbestos exposure. OSHA is responsible for the health and safety of workers. The EPA develops and enforces regulations to protect the public and the environment. Your employer must also comply with state and local regulations.

The most important consequence of failing to comply with regulations regarding asbestos is that people will become sick and may even die. Additionally, employers who fail to comply face significant fines, permit suspensions, liability, lawsuits and jail time. Your employer wants people to be safe. They need YOUR help to identify and avoid dangerous conditions.

Classifications and Training Requirements

OSHA classifies asbestos work in four levels. As you move from Class IV to Class I, each level has increasingly stringent training and control requirements:

- **Class IV** workers perform custodial activities in which they may contact ACM
- **Class III** workers focus on repair and maintenance operations where workers may disturb ACM or PACM
- **Class II** workers remove other types of ACM that are not TSI. This includes resilient flooring and roofing materials that contain asbestos and asbestos-containing wallboard
- **Class I** workers remove thermal system insulation (TSI) and sprayed-on or troweled-on surfacing asbestos-containing materials (ACM) or presumed asbestos-containing materials (PACM). This class of asbestos workers has the most stringent training and control requirements

OSHA requires employers to train all workers who may contact or be exposed to ACM about who is responsible for managing ACM, the location of ACM in their work areas, operations and maintenance (O&M) programs and responding to emergencies involving ACM.

Medical Surveillance and Recordkeeping Requirements

Employers must provide free medical exams to workers who engage in any asbestos work other than maintenance or custodial work for 30 or more days per year where asbestos is present but will not be disturbed. Medical surveillance program exams include a comprehensive medical questionnaire, a physical examination and a full lung-function exam.

Medical professionals will provide employers with written results and opinions regarding the patient's health risk if exposed to asbestos. They will only share information related to asbestos exposure. Employers must provide copies of the results to the patient within 30 days of receiving them. Exams will happen every year.

Employers must keep accurate physical or digital records of:

- Monitoring measurements for 30 years
- Medical surveillance for the duration of the employee's employment plus 30 years
- Training records for 1 year beyond the last date of employment