



Mesothelioma in the Military

Serving in the military comes with many risks, one of which might come as a surprise for those unfamiliar: developing mesothelioma. Individuals who served in the military between the 1930s to the 1980s may have come into contact with asbestos, a mineral composed of millions of small fibers. Exposure to asbestos can lead to the development of mesothelioma, an aggressive form of cancer. Below we discuss asbestos exposure in the military, as well as the legal options available to veterans who were exposed to asbestos during their service.

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How Exposure to Asbestos Leads to Mesothelioma

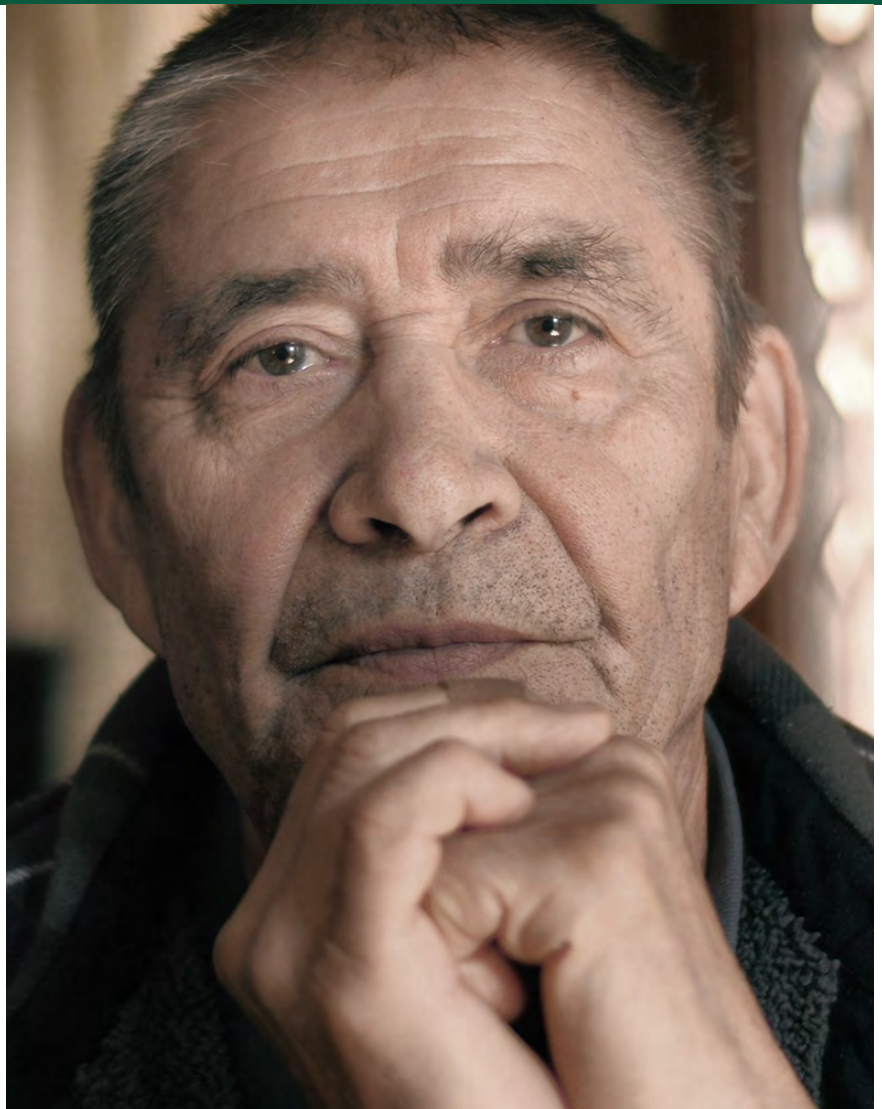
Mesothelioma refers to an aggressive form of cancer that develops on the mesothelium, a thin layer of tissue that covers most internal organs. Asbestos, a mineral with many small fibers, can lead to mesothelioma if an individual inhales or otherwise consumes these fibers over time. This is because the fibers present in asbestos do not break down when inside the body and instead stick to the mesothelium lining that surrounds the internal organs. Over time these fibers cause inflammation in the affected areas, as well as abnormal cell growth and tumors.

Because asbestos is particularly prone to falling apart and becoming airborne, it is fairly common for inhalation of these fibers to lead to mesothelioma in the lungs specifically. However, mesothelioma can also occur in the heart, abdomen, ovaries, or testicles.



Symptoms of Mesothelioma

- Pain in the chest
- Pain when coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Lumps forming under the skin on the chest
- Unusual weight loss
- Pain or swelling in the abdomen
- Nausea
- Menstrual changes
- Fatigue
- Back pain
- Chronic sore throat
- Feeling hoarse
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty with digestion
- Unusual changes in bowel movements



If you or your loved one is experiencing any of these symptoms and have served in the military, you may want to bring this information to the attention of your doctor. Your physician can help determine whether you have developed mesothelioma and what your treatment options are. It is important to note that mesothelioma is aggressive and can be fatal. Unfortunately, there is no cure for mesothelioma at this time. However, there are mesothelioma treatments that are available to help reduce symptoms and slow the spread of this cancer. The main treatments of mesothelioma include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

Exposure to Asbestos in the Military



Members of the military who served between the 1930s and 1980s may have received assignments that put them in close contact with asbestos. Asbestos was often used in construction materials on military bases, regularly exposing members of the U.S. armed services to the toxin regularly. Members of the Navy were especially highly exposed to the toxin.

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs lists a vast array of occupations that could have resulted in exposure to asbestos, including:

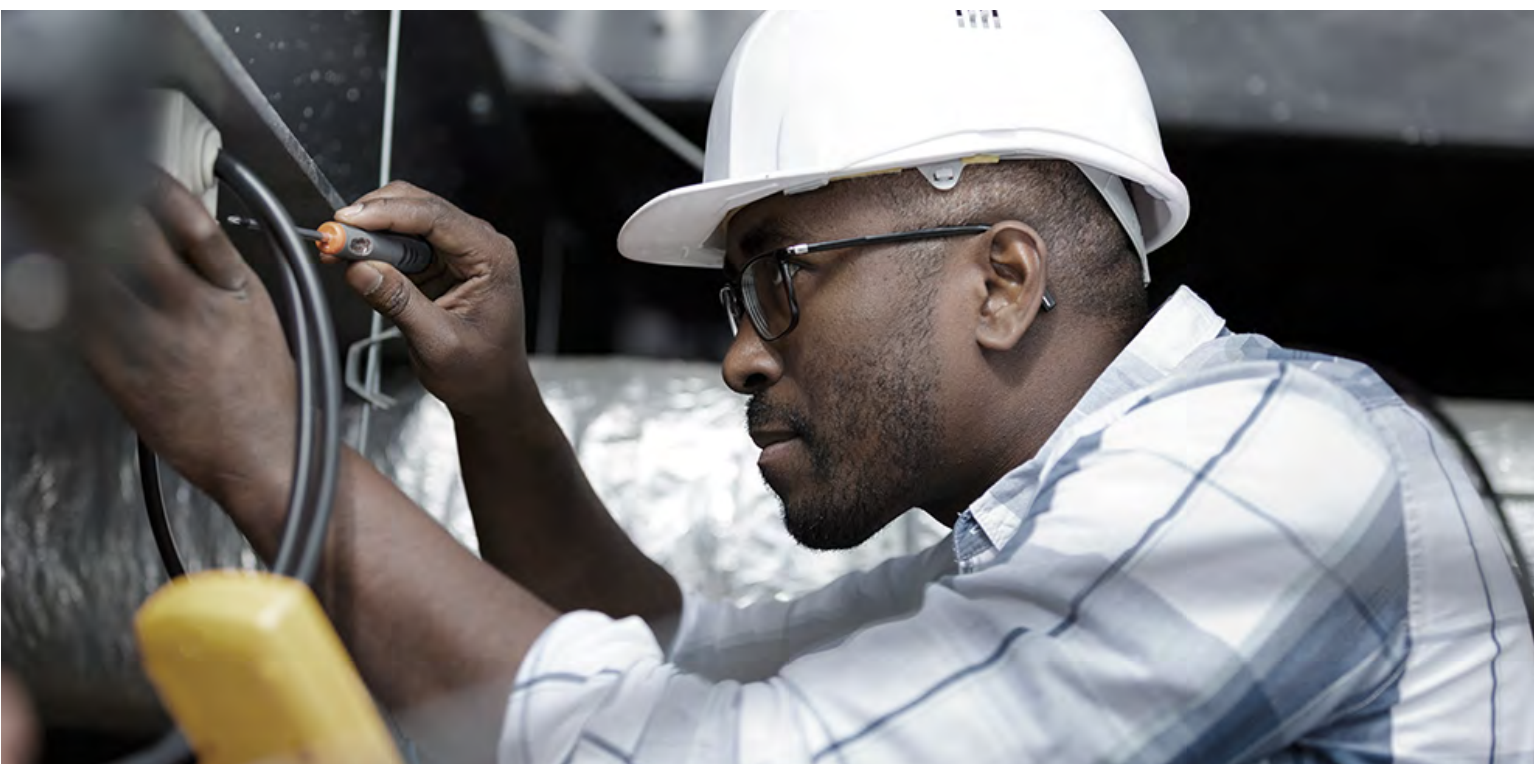
- Work on insulation and shipyards
- Construction
- Carpentry
- Mining
- Milling
- Building demolition
- Manufacturing and installation of roofing, flooring, and other products

Even though asbestos is no longer a regularly used building material, armed forces members who have recently served in countries such as Iraq in the Middle East during either of the two last Gulf wars may have been exposed during building demolition. In some cases, service members and their families are at risk because of asbestos used in military housing.

Unfortunately, mesothelioma can take decades to become noticeable. A service member may not know that they have mesothelioma until the symptoms start to arise later in life, which can happen well after they have been discharged from the military. This is because the small fibers can sit on the mesothelium for years, causing an irritation that slowly makes way to abnormal cells or cancer cells.

Secondary Exposure

Unfortunately, asbestos exposure also carries beyond direct work with asbestos. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains that secondary exposure could occur if, for example, an electrician worked in a navy shipyard. Even if he did not touch or go near the asbestos, if he shared workspace with those who did, he could be exposed.



Military Branches and Asbestos Exposure

All branches of the military used asbestos products between the 1930s and 1980s, and it took many years following that before they were able to replace asbestos products with alternatives. Even veterans who didn't necessarily operate in the occupations listed above were exposed to asbestos in their sleeping quarters, buildings, and in various ships, airplanes, and vehicles. The greatest risk, however, definitely lies with those veterans who worked directly with asbestos materials. Let's take a look at how this breaks down in the different military branches.

Asbestos Exposure in the Navy

The United States Navy used more asbestos-contaminated products than any other military branch. When the Navy found out that their servicemen and servicewomen were put at risk, they took action to remove asbestos from their fleet and ensured that veterans receive disability compensation payments starting at \$3,100. These are paid out to veterans who have received a diagnosis of mesothelioma, lung cancer, and other asbestos-related illnesses.

Navy veterans are also entitled to sue the private companies that lied to the United States Navy about the risks of asbestos exposure. The average mesothelioma settlement pays around \$1 million to \$1.4 million. This is the type of claim that the lawyers at Cooney & Conway help veterans with.

Asbestos-contaminated products that were used in the Navy included:

- Packing materials
- Spray-on insulation
- Aggregate mixtures
- Cables
- Paneling
- Thermal materials
- Bedding compounds
- Deck covering materials
- Paint
- Valves
- Block insulation
- Gaskets
- Pipe insulation
- Adhesives
- Boiler insulation
- Grinders
- Pumps

The Navy was aware there were risks involved with using asbestos in the 1940s. They didn't, however, realize how harmful asbestos was until many years later when confirmed asbestos-related illnesses started developing. They now know that service members were exposed to asbestos on their vessels, land vehicles, and buildings into the 1990s (at which point asbestos had mostly been removed or vessels with asbestos were decommissioned).

Asbestos Exposure in the Air Force

Many United States Air Force veterans were exposed to high levels of asbestos between 1930 and 1970 on military bases and inside the aircraft in which they worked and may have even been exposed within the last five years. Upon diagnoses of mesothelioma and other asbestos-related illnesses tied to their service, Air Force veterans are eligible to receive disability compensation and free cancer treatment if they file a claim with the VA. Air Force veterans are also entitled to sue the private companies that lied to the United States military about the risks of asbestos exposure, which is something that our lawyers at Cooney & Conway can help with.

The Air Force had a long history of using asbestos products on their bases, radar stations, and aircraft. One of the more recent abatements of asbestos in the Air Force was performed on their Kadena Air Base in Asia in 2016. Asbestos exposure in the Air Force is still a concern for military personnel and civilian contractors to this day.

Jobs in the Air Force that are assumed to have had the highest risk of exposure to asbestos include:

- Environmental support specialists
 - Welders
 - Boiler workers
 - Firefighters
 - Aircraft electricians
 - Construction workers
 - Vehicle mechanics
 - Aircraft mechanics
-

Asbestos Exposure in the Army

Veterans of the United States Army are at high risk for mesothelioma and other asbestos-related illnesses due to their exposure to asbestos while in service. Army servicemen and servicewomen who receive a diagnosis that is linked to their time in service can file a claim with the VA and receive 100% disability compensation and free treatment. They are also entitled to sue the private companies that lied to the United States military about the risks of asbestos exposure, which is something that our lawyers at Cooney & Conway can help with.

In the Army, the use of asbestos-contaminated products increased during World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. The Army used asbestos for much of their building construction, vehicles, and mechanical parts such as gaskets, clutch plates, and brake pads for decades. It wasn't until the 1970s that they stopped using it in new construction, and the toxic minerals remained in many Army installations for decades.

Jobs in the Army that are assumed to have had the highest risk of exposure to asbestos include:

- Carpentry
- Construction
- Demolition
- Insulating

In 1998, the Army launched the Installation Asbestos Management Program to protect its service members from further asbestos health risks. This has minimized risk in the United States; however, there is still a high risk of exposure to asbestos for Army personnel that are deployed to developing nations.

Asbestos Exposure in the Marines

Many service members and veterans in the United States Marines have been exposed to asbestos on ships (particularly Navy), aircraft, armored vehicles, and even within their barracks. Virtually every Marine installation was built with asbestos-contaminated products. Much of the contamination remains to this day. In May 2020, the United States Defence Department's Inspector General reported that 38,000 Marine housing units contained asbestos or lead.

Bases on which asbestos contamination has been documented include:

- Base Camp Pendleton
- Base Camp Lejeune
- Air Station Yuma
- Air Station El Toro
- Logistics Base Barstow

Asbestos Exposure in the Coast Guard

Veterans in the United States Coast Guard have the same amount of risk as those in the United States Navy. While they are a tenth of the size of the Navy, the rate of mesothelioma cases is comparable. Coast Guard veterans with asbestos-related illness diagnoses can file a claim with the VA to receive low-cost treatment or free cancer treatment, among other benefits.

Coast Guard veterans who served during World War II face the greatest risk of asbestos-related illnesses and cancer, as asbestos was heavily relied upon at that time. Asbestos has been documented at Curtis Bay Coast Guard Yard and onboard vessels.

Jobs in the Coast Guard that are assumed to have had the highest risk of exposure to asbestos include:

- Shipyard insulation work
- Boiler and engine room maintenance
- Cargo ship inspection



Veterans Pay the Price

Because of this high level of exposure, many veterans in the United States have developed lung cancer and mesothelioma. An estimated 40,000 cancer cases are reported each year to the Veterans Affairs Central Cancer Registry, according to a 2012 report published in the U.S. National Library of Medicine. The researchers examined data from 2007 to provide a comprehensive picture of cancer among veterans. They found that in 2007, 18.8 percent of VA cancer patients were diagnosed with lung or bronchial cancer, the second most common kind of cancer in the group, followed only by prostate cancer.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers some services to veterans who are worried about having been exposed during their service, including lung cancer screenings. There are also local support groups available to veterans with cancer offered through some chapters of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Legal and Compensation Options for Veterans

If you or your loved one developed mesothelioma as a result of time spent in service to the military, you may be entitled to financial compensation. Below we outline the legal and compensation options for veterans and their families who have received a diagnosis of mesothelioma.

Disability Benefits

The VA offers disability compensation to veterans diagnosed with mesothelioma due to exposure to asbestos during their time in service to the military. These benefits are awarded to veterans who demonstrate the connection between their condition and asbestos exposure that arose during their time in service. Once a veteran's claim is approved, they are granted a 100% disability rating, which describes their disability level and grants them access to monthly payments and free cancer treatments through the VA health care system.

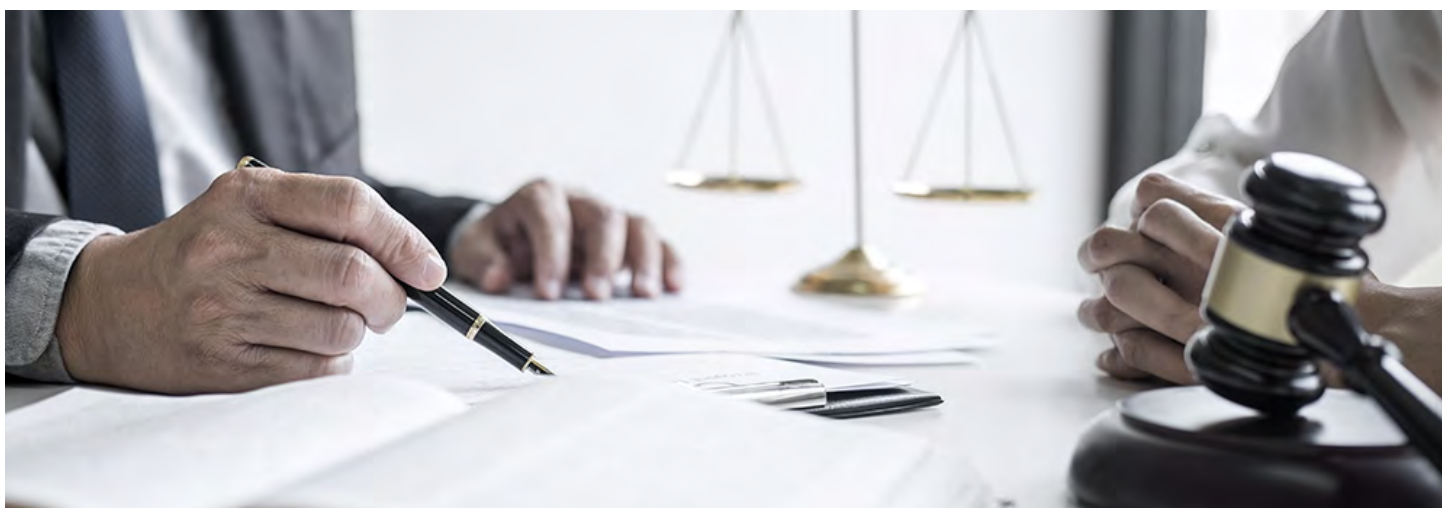
Veterans diagnosed with these other asbestos-related diseases may also be eligible for disability benefits:

- Asbestosis
- Interstitial pulmonary fibrosis
- Lung cancer
- Bronchus cancer
- Gastrointestinal cancer
- Larynx cancer
- Pleural effusion
- Pleural plaques
- Pharynx cancer
- Urogenital cancers (except prostate)

If you have not received a diagnosis or are questioning whether or not you were exposed, read on to learn more about the usage of asbestos products in the different military branches.



Mesothelioma Lawsuits



Veterans can also pursue legal action against the companies and manufacturers that produced the asbestos or equipment that played a part in their development of mesothelioma. Depending on the specifics of your case, you may elect to pursue a personal injury claim to cover the costs associated with your medical bills, lost wages, pain and suffering, or other types of financial compensation. Another option involves pursuing a wrongful death claim in the event that your loved one passed away as a result of having mesothelioma.

You may also seek to file a trust fund claim against the companies responsible for your condition. The compensation derived from trust funds was set up by asbestos companies that went bankrupt but set aside money to cover past and future claims against them.

Each of these legal options comes with its own pros and cons, including financial payout and timeline considerations, for example. It is important to speak with an attorney to determine which legal options are right for you.

Other Financial Assistance

In addition to VA benefits and mesothelioma lawsuits, an individual may also elect to cover the financial costs associated with their mesothelioma diagnosis with other forms of financial assistance. Social Security benefits can be used to cover such costs, as well as the many non-profit organizations that provide financial assistance to mesothelioma patients and their families.

What to do After a Diagnosis of Mesothelioma

If you or a loved one is a current or former military service member who has been diagnosed with mesothelioma, you may want to pursue legal action to secure the compensation you need for medical treatment and peace of mind. Connecting your mesothelioma to your time in the military is an important step in this process. At the same time, documenting your time in the military, your exposure to asbestos, as well as your diagnosis and ongoing treatments, are crucial in securing financial compensation for this aggressive illness. An experienced attorney at Cooney & Conway can help guide you through these processes.

**Call us toll free today
(800) 322-5573**