Asbestos Information for Community Members
Introduction

• What is asbestos?
• What are past and present uses of asbestos?
• Why is asbestos a health concern?
• What are some asbestos-associated diseases?
• What should you do if you have been exposed to asbestos?
What is asbestos?

• Naturally occurring mineral
• Made up of long, thin fibers
• Fibers are heat resistant, strong, flexible and very stable
• Used widely in industry from the early 1900s to the 1970s
What is asbestos? Continued

• Loose or crumbling asbestos can release fibers into air

• Can breathe in tiny asbestos fibers without knowing it

• Some fibers breathed in can become lodged in lungs and may cause lung disease

• Symptoms of asbestos-related diseases may appear many years after exposure

• Not everyone exposed to asbestos develops health problems
Past Exposure in the Workplace

• Used in many industries in the United States before the 1970s
• Used in pipe and insulation coverings, boilers, industrial furnaces, and brake pads
• Workers who made asbestos-containing products at greatest risk of exposure during this time
• Workers carried asbestos dust home on skin and clothes
Past Exposure in the Workplace. Continued

- Asbestos still in some materials today
- Mined natural vermiculite mineral was contaminated with tremolite asbestos.
- Contaminated natural vermiculite was sold in attic insulation and potting soil
- People who handled contaminated vermiculite in manufacturing plants throughout country were exposed
Current Exposure in the Workplace

• During repair, renovation, removal, and maintenance of old asbestos-containing products such as automobile, buildings, homes

• Occupations that involve contact with old asbestos materials:
  - Carpenters
  - Construction worker
  - Utility workers
  - Electricians
  - Pipe fitters, Plumbers
  - Steel mill workers
  - Boilers makers, Shipyard workers
  - Mechanics working with brake and transmission products
Current Exposure in the Workplace. Continued

• Workers may disturb asbestos in old, phased-out products, such as insulation or pipe coverings

• Only disturbed, broken asbestos-containing materials release asbestos fibers

• Follow the appropriate safety procedures when handling asbestos in the workplace
Exposure at Home

• Exposure:
  – Occurs in attics with asbestos-containing insulation, pipes and boilers with asbestos covers, during home repairs.

• What to do:
  – Proper handling of asbestos is very important
  – Seek professional assistance
  – Contact your local health department for a listing of trained and certified asbestos contractors
Naturally occurring asbestos

• Asbestos is mainly found in underground rocks

• Asbestos fibers can be released if rocks are disturbed by human activities:
  – Mining (no longer occurs in the United States)
  – Construction (if rocks with naturally occurring asbestos is close to the surface)
Risk of Illness

- Risk depends on three factors:
  1. number of fibers breathed in,
  2. how long you were exposed,
  3. number of times you were exposed

- Risk continues after exposure has stopped

- Symptoms usually begin 15–40 years after first exposure

- Not everyone who is exposed to asbestos will get sick
## Asbestos-Associated Diseases – Parenchymal Asbestosis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenchymal asbestosis</td>
<td>A chronic lung disease caused by the scarring or thickening of lung tissue</td>
<td>Breathlessness that gets increasingly worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes: Cough and chest tightness or pain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Asbestos-Associated Diseases – Asbestos-Related Plural Abnormalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asbestos-related plural abnormalities</td>
<td>Occurs when asbestos fibers reach the lining of the lungs, called the pleura.</td>
<td>Presence of asbestos fibers can cause various reactions in the lung linings, many which are pretty mild.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disease</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Typical Symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung cancer</td>
<td>The same type of cancer caused by smoking and other factors</td>
<td>None (until late stage) Sometimes: Cough, wheezing, and difficulty breathing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Asbestos-Associated Diseases - Mesothelioma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mesothelioma</td>
<td>A type of cancer that affects the lining of the lungs or the lining of the abdomen</td>
<td>None (until late stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes: Cough, chest pain, and difficulty breathing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What To Do If You Have Been Exposed To Asbestos

• Stop exposure

• Contact your doctor about receiving:
  - Chest X-ray
  - Pulmonary function tests
  - Annual flu shots and a pneumococcal vaccine

• Quit smoking
Summary

• Asbestos is a mineral that was widely used in industry until the 1970s

• When disturbed, asbestos fibers are released into the air and you can breathe them in

• Asbestos can cause parenchymal asbestosis, asbestos-related pleural abnormalities, lung cancer, and mesothelioma

• If you are being exposed to asbestos, stop exposure immediately and contact your doctor
For More Information on Asbestos

• Contact CDC-INFO
  - 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
  - TTY 888-232-6348 (24 hours/day)
  - E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

- Web addresses:
  http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/contactus.html