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Statement from Acting Surgeon General Steven K. Galson about National Asbestos Week

In recognition of 'National Asbestos Awareness Week,' I urge every American to become aware of the public health issues of asbestos exposure and the steps they can take to protect their health.

In recent decades, because of concern about asbestos' health effects, production and use has declined substantially. Most individuals exposed to asbestos, whether in a home, in the workplace, or out-of-doors will not develop disease- but **there is no level of asbestos exposure that is known to be safe and minimizing your exposure will minimize your risk of developing asbestos-related disease.**

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the environment. Low levels of asbestos are commonly in the air as fibers enter the environment from natural rock outcroppings, products that contain asbestos, former asbestos mining and milling operations, and from disturbance of asbestos-containing material. It is when we are exposed to much more concentrated levels of asbestos that we should be concerned. Therefore, it is important for all Americans to be aware of asbestos levels in their environment.

Asbestos can be dangerous if it is inhaled. Activity that disturbs asbestos causing these small fibers to float in air increases the chances of inhalation and the contraction of asbestos-related diseases. Disturbance is what leads to exposure. Do not attempt to touch or remove asbestos by yourself. Only people professionally trained and certified to safely handle asbestos should remove it.

Once breathed in, asbestos fibers can remain in the lungs for years and even decades. Inhalation of asbestos fibers can cause inflammation and scarring of the lungs, changes in the lining of the chest cavity around the lung, and certain cancers. Remember that tobacco smoke greatly increases your risk of lung cancer if you have also been exposed to asbestos.

If you think you have been exposed to asbestos, I encourage you to speak to your health care provider. Your provider can tell you if any of your health problems might be caused by asbestos exposure.

To learn more about asbestos and asbestos related diseases, please visit:

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asbestos/>

<http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>