

Potential Exposure to Asbestos: USS Ponchatoula was a steam powered ship. Asbestos was used for insulation around the many steam pipes throughout the ship. The flooring tiles also contained asbestos fibers. The asbestos containing materials were frequently disturbed during yard periods or for emergency repairs. Veterans may file a claim for disability compensation for health problems they believe are related to their exposure to asbestos fibers during military service. VA decides these claims on a case-by-case basis.

Eligibility Requirements

- You must be a Veteran who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable
- You must have been exposed to asbestos while in military service
- You must have a disease or disability related to the asbestos exposure that occurred in military service

Exposure to asbestos can be a serious health risk if asbestos-containing material is disturbed in such a way that the particles and fibers become airborne. Symptoms of asbestos-related diseases, such as shortness of breath, coughing, and chest pain, often do not appear until 20 to 50 years after the exposure.

If you are concerned about health problems associated with asbestos exposure during your military service, talk to your health care provider or local VA Environmental Health Coordinator.

How Veterans may have been exposed to asbestos

Veterans who served in any of the following occupations may have been exposed to asbestos: mining, milling, shipyard work, insulation work, demolition of old buildings, carpentry and construction, manufacturing and installation of products such as flooring and roofing. If you were physically in the vicinity of any repairs or replacement to asbestos containing pipes or floor tiles, whether in a shipyard or at sea aboard ship, you could have been exposed to airborne fibers when the contaminant was released into the air.

Health problems associated with exposure to asbestos:

Breathing asbestos mainly causes problems in the lungs and the membrane that surrounds the lungs, including:

Asbestosis: Scarring of lung tissue that causes breathing problems, usually in workers exposed to asbestos in workplaces before the Federal government began regulating asbestos use (mid-1970s).

Pleural plaques: Scarring in the inner surface of the ribcage and area surrounding the lungs that can cause breathing problems, though usually not as serious as asbestosis. People living in areas with high environmental levels of asbestos, as well as workers, can develop pleural plaques.

Cancer: The two types of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos are lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the thin lining surrounding the lung (pleural membrane) or abdominal cavity (the peritoneum). Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer usually caused by asbestos exposure.

Asbestos Information:

Department of Veterans Affairs Website: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/claims-postservice-exposures-asbestos.asp>

Legal Assistance: John Wells specializes in assisting active Military and Veterans with legal issues.

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