

## **TOOLBOX TALK #9**

### **KEEPING WORKERS SAFE FROM ASBESTOS**

Asbestos, a group of minerals that occur naturally as bundles of fibers, was once touted as the “miracle product” for its strength and ability to resist corrosion and fire. However, asbestos can be extremely dangerous to workers, and is now known to cause cancer in humans.



When disturbed, asbestos fibers are released into the air. “Breathing asbestos fibers can cause a buildup of scar-like tissue in the lungs called asbestosis and result in loss of lung function that often progresses to disability and death, according to OSHA. Asbestos also causes cancer of the lung and other diseases such as mesothelioma of the

pleura which is a fatal malignant tumor of the membrane lining the cavity of the lung or stomach.

OSHA has a construction industry standard that covers construction, alteration, repair, maintenance, or renovation and demolition of structures containing asbestos. This standard offers a variety of protections, including a permissible exposure limit (PEL) of 0.1 fibers per cubic centimeter of air over an 8-hour time-weighted average, with an excursion limit (EL) of 1.0 asbestos fiber per cubic centimeter over a 30 minute period.

OSHA also notes that an assessment of workplaces covered by these standards must be completed first to determine whether asbestos is present. Then, the workplaces must be monitored to detect if asbestos exposure is at or above the PEL or EL for workers who are, or may be expected to be, exposed to asbestos. If the exposure exceeds the PEL or EL, employers must provide engineering controls and work practices to the extent feasible to keep it at or below the PEL and EL, according to the agency.