

HVAC and Insulation Workers Face a High Risk of Mesothelioma

Older Heating and Cooling Systems Put Tradespeople Around Asbestos Every Day

HVAC and insulation workers faced some of the heaviest occupational asbestos exposure in the United States, and mesothelioma can appear decades later. A [CDC analysis of mesothelioma deaths](#) found that insulation workers had the highest proportionate mortality ratio among 274 occupations studied, nearly 27 times the expected level.

HVAC workers weren't measured as a separate occupation in that analysis, but their work routinely placed them around the same hazardous materials. Heating and cooling technicians installed equipment beside insulated pipes, repaired boilers and furnaces, cut through walls and ceilings, and removed old insulation to reach mechanical components.

Those exposures may have occurred decades before a diagnosis. Investigating a retired technician's or insulation worker's job history can show whether a [mesothelioma claim](#) connects to dust inhaled while installing or repairing mechanical systems earlier in life.

Key Findings

- **Insulation Workers Topped the List:** In a CDC study of 274 occupations, insulation workers had the highest proportionate mortality ratio for mesothelioma.
- **HVAC Work Overlapped Heavily:** Technicians disturbed the same insulation, gaskets, and boiler materials while servicing older heating and cooling systems.
- **Smoking Doesn't Cause Mesothelioma:** A smoking history doesn't prevent an asbestos claim, since asbestos exposure causes most cases of this cancer.
- **Closed Companies Can Still Pay:** Many former asbestos manufacturers set up bankruptcy trusts that continue accepting qualifying claims.

Why Insulation Work Created Such Heavy Asbestos Exposure

[Asbestos](#) insulation was valued for its resistance to heat, fire, and chemical damage. It was applied to pipes, boilers, tanks, ducts, furnaces, and other components in commercial buildings and industrial facilities, and insulation workers handled these materials directly throughout the workday.

Installing insulation could require workers to cut blocks, shape pipe covering, mix insulating cement, or wrap equipment with asbestos cloth. Repair and removal work could be even more hazardous, since old insulation became dry, brittle, and easy to crumble.

Much of the work happened in mechanical rooms, utility tunnels, crawl spaces, and other confined areas with limited ventilation. Dust released only a few feet from a worker's face could stay suspended in the air and settle on clothing, hair, and tools.

How Asbestos Exposure Happened to HVAC Workers

HVAC technicians didn't need the title of "insulator" to encounter asbestos. Servicing heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems frequently required them to disturb materials installed by other trades. Higher-risk tasks included:

- **Removing Pipe or Duct Insulation:** Workers often pulled insulation away to access joints, controls, valves, or damaged sections of a system.
- **[Repairing Boilers and Furnaces](#):** Opening older heating equipment could disturb internal insulation, refractory materials, furnace cement, gaskets, and heat shields.
- **Replacing Gaskets and Seals:** Scraping old gaskets from pumps, valves, compressors, and heating equipment could release fibers from deteriorated material.
- **Cutting Through Walls and Ceilings:** Reaching ductwork or installing new lines could disturb asbestos joint compound, plaster, ceiling materials, and sprayed fireproofing.
- **Removing Old HVAC Systems:** Renovation and demolition work could release dust from insulation, duct coverings, and nearby building materials.
- **Working Beside Other Trades:** HVAC technicians could inhale dust generated by insulators, pipefitters, boilermakers, and demolition crews working in the same area.
- **Cleaning Mechanical Areas:** Sweeping or blowing out dust after repairs could send settled asbestos fibers back into the air.

The absence of warning labels didn't mean the materials were safe. Workers frequently had no reason to know that insulation, gaskets, or other ordinary-looking components contained asbestos, which is why a detailed look at old job sites matters so much after a diagnosis.

Exposure Could Continue After New Asbestos Use Declined

Restrictions and changing industry practices reduced the use of asbestos in new [construction](#), but they didn't remove it from existing buildings. HVAC and insulation workers kept entering schools, hospitals, factories, office buildings, and plants built when asbestos materials were common.

Maintenance work could be especially dangerous, since technicians often encountered damaged insulation without the controls used during a planned asbestos-removal project. A worker might arrive expecting to repair a furnace and discover deteriorated insulation only after the job had begun.

Current workers can still face exposure when servicing older buildings. The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) warns that maintenance personnel and engineers may

encounter asbestos in furnace rooms, on insulated boilers and pipes, and during minor renovations.

Mesothelioma May Appear Long After Retirement

Mesothelioma commonly [takes between 20 and 40 years to develop](#), and some documented latency periods have been considerably longer. A worker exposed early in a career may therefore retire before experiencing any symptoms.

That delay can make the occupational connection hard to recognize. A person diagnosed in their seventies may not immediately think about boiler rooms, duct installations, or insulation jobs from the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s, and doctors may know little about a patient's early employment.

[Smoking doesn't cause mesothelioma and doesn't prevent an asbestos claim](#). The important questions concern where the worker encountered asbestos, how the fibers became airborne, and which companies supplied or controlled the materials.

What a Diagnosis Can Mean Financially for Former Insulation or HVAC Workers

A mesothelioma diagnosis can create [expenses and losses](#) that extend far beyond the first hospital bill. Depending on the claim and state law, compensation may account for:

- **Medical Expenses:** Surgery, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, medications, hospital stays, and other treatment costs that can climb quickly after diagnosis.
- **Future Care:** Home health assistance, medical equipment, additional treatment, and end-of-life care a patient may need over time.
- **Lost Income:** Wages, retirement contributions, and other earnings the patient loses because of the disease, with certain caregiver-related losses potentially recoverable depending on state law.
- **Travel Costs:** Transportation and lodging required to get specialized cancer treatment, often far from home.
- **Pain and Suffering:** Physical pain, breathing difficulties, emotional distress, and reduced quality of life caused by the disease.
- **Losses to the Family:** Loss of companionship, household services, and financial support when state law allows family members to recover.
- **Wrongful Death Compensation:** Funeral expenses and other family losses that may be recoverable if the patient dies from the disease.

Former insulation and HVAC workers often encountered products from several manufacturers, creating more than one potential claim. The table below shows the main sources of compensation.

Source of Compensation	How It Works
Lawsuits against operating companies	Claims against manufacturers and other responsible companies still in business
Asbestos bankruptcy trusts	Funds set up by former manufacturers that continue accepting qualifying claims
Workers' compensation	Benefits that may be available in some circumstances, depending on state law
Veterans' benefits	Benefits that may be available for workers exposed during military service

A company doesn't need to remain in business for compensation to be available, since many former manufacturers established [bankruptcy trusts](#). Finding every available source means reconstructing the work history, identifying the products used, and coordinating claims before filing deadlines expire.

What It Takes to Prove an Asbestos Claim

A mesothelioma diagnosis alone isn't enough to recover compensation. The claim must connect the worker's exposure to specific asbestos products, job sites, and responsible companies.

[Proving that connection](#) relies on evidence such as:

- **Employment and Union Records:** Documents that establish where and when the person worked, sometimes going back several decades.
- **Coworker Testimony:** Accounts from former coworkers who can identify products, equipment, and working conditions at shared job sites.
- **Purchase and Work-Site Records:** Records showing which asbestos products were bought and used at a particular facility.
- **Equipment Manuals and Product Catalogs:** Materials that connect boilers, HVAC systems, and replacement parts to specific manufacturers.
- **Evidence From Earlier Cases:** Findings from past asbestos cases that already documented certain products at the same job site.

Gathering these records, locating witnesses, and identifying the responsible companies is detailed work that has to happen before filing deadlines run. The worker only needs to share the job sites, employers, and duties they can remember.

Ferrell Law Group Represents HVAC and Insulation Workers Nationwide

[Ferrell Law Group](#) represents HVAC technicians, insulation workers, and other tradespeople diagnosed with mesothelioma or another cancer connected to [occupational asbestos exposure](#). Our firm investigates old employers, work sites, equipment, and products to identify every available source of compensation.

Ferrell Law Group has [recovered hundreds of millions of dollars](#) for clients nationwide, including \$2.8 million for a military veteran.

Workers and families can [contact us](#) for a free consultation. There is no fee unless we win, and our attorneys can travel to clients who can't come to our office.