Asbestos-related cancers and respiratory diseases among sheet metal workers

Mortality among sheet metal workers participating in a medical screening program

John Dement, Laura Welch, and Gavin West. CPWR Report, April 2014.

Key Findings

- Sheet metal workers, although their exposure to asbestos is largely intermittent and indirect, demonstrated increased risk of dying from asbestos-related diseases.
- Sheet metal workers in the sample population demonstrated greatly elevated mortality from asbestosis, mesothelioma, and pleural cancers when compared to the general population. The sheet metal workers with twenty or more years at the trade were twelve times more likely to die of asbestosis than the average American worker, and seven times more likely to die from mesothelioma or pleural cancers.
- Workers diagnosed with asbestosis were at elevated risk of lung cancer and the risk increased as the severity of scarring (as measured by ILO profusion scores) increased.
- Even workers who had not developed asbestosis (i.e., with ILO profusion scores <1/0) exhibited elevated rates of lung cancer, pleural cancer and mesothelioma.
- Increased interstitial markings on chest x-rays and years in the trade were predictive of death from COPD, suggesting a relationship between asbestos exposure and COPD mortality.

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