

Mesothelioma History

The first lawsuit against asbestos manufacturers was brought in 1929. The parties settled that lawsuit, and as part of the agreement, the attorneys agreed not to pursue further cases. It was not until 1960 that an article published by Wagner et al first officially established mesothelioma as a disease arising from exposure to crocidolite asbestos.[9] The article referred to over 30 case studies of people who had suffered from mesothelioma in South Africa. Some exposures were transient and some were mine workers. In 1962 McNulty reported the first diagnosed case of malignant mesothelioma in an Australian asbestos worker.[10] The worker had worked in the mill at the asbestos mine in Wittenoom from 1948 to 1950.

In the town of Wittenoom, asbestos-containing mine waste was used to cover schoolyards and playgrounds. In 1965 an article in the British Journal of Industrial Medicine established that people who lived in the neighbourhoods of asbestos factories and mines, but did not work in them, had contracted mesothelioma.

Despite proof that the dust associated with asbestos mining and milling causes asbestos related disease, mining began at Wittenoom in 1943 and continued until 1966. In 1974 the first public warnings of the dangers of blue asbestos were published in a cover story called "Is this Killer in Your Home?" in Australia's Bulletin magazine. In 1978 the Western Australian Government decided to phase out the town of Wittenoom, following the publication of a Health Dept. booklet, "The Health Hazard at Wittenoom", containing the results of air sampling and an appraisal of worldwide medical information.

By 1979 the first writs for negligence related to Wittenoom were issued against CSR and its subsidiary ABA, and the Asbestos Diseases Society was formed to represent the Wittenoom victims.

About the Author

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