

Occupational diseases caused by asbestos exposure

The number of approved occupational diseases caused by asbestos has decreased between 2005 and 2023, according to statistics from Afa Insurance.

This report is based on a review of **393 occupational diseases caused by asbestos exposure**. The cases in the report have onset years between 2005 and 2023 and have been approved by Afa Insurance. The statistics come from Afa Insurance's claims database and were retrieved on December 31, 2024.

Afa Insurance administers insurance schemes established through collective agreements between employer and employee organizations. Approximately nine out of ten Swedish employees are covered by work injury insurance.

An occupational disease is an illness that can arise or worsen due to work or working conditions. It is considered a work-related injury. For an occupational disease to be assessed by Afa Insurance, the symptoms must have persisted for at least 180 days and be approved by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency or be listed in the International Labour Organization (ILO) list of occupational diseases.

The occupational injury insurance TFA (Work Injury Insurance) covers all employees – both blue-collar and white-collar employees – within the agreement areas Svenskt Näringsliv/LO/PTK and Frelia/LO/PTK (TFA-KP). TFA-KL covers all employees in municipalities, regions, the Church of Sweden, and Sobona companies. Afa Insurance also administers and regulates work injuries under the state personal injury agreement (PSA).

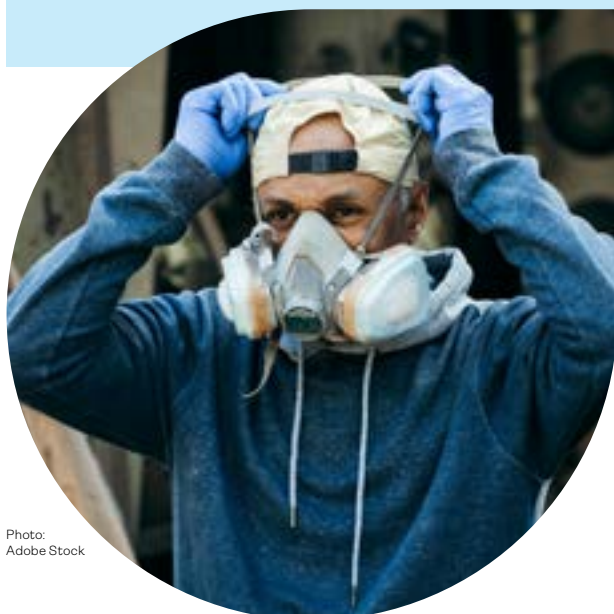


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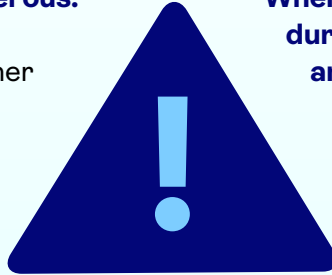
In this report, occupational diseases are presented by onset year, meaning the year the injury first appears. An occupational disease is considered to have appeared at the first doctor's visit or the first day of sick leave due to the injury. The onset year is determined when the injury is approved as a work injury by Afa Insurance. The reporting year may differ from the onset year.

Asbestos is a collective term for six different fibrous, crystallized silicates previously used in buildings. The material was valued for its technical properties, such as fire resistance, thermal insulation, and high strength.

Asbestos was banned in Sweden in 1982 and in the EU in 2005. Despite this, the material still exists in many older buildings, such as in the form of asbestos cement sheets, meaning risks remain during renovation or demolition.

In solid form, asbestos is not dangerous.

However, hazardous dust is released during processing, demolition, or other handling. This dust contains microscopic asbestos fibers that are extremely dangerous to inhale.



When handling asbestos – for example, during demolition work – workers are exposed to significant health risks.

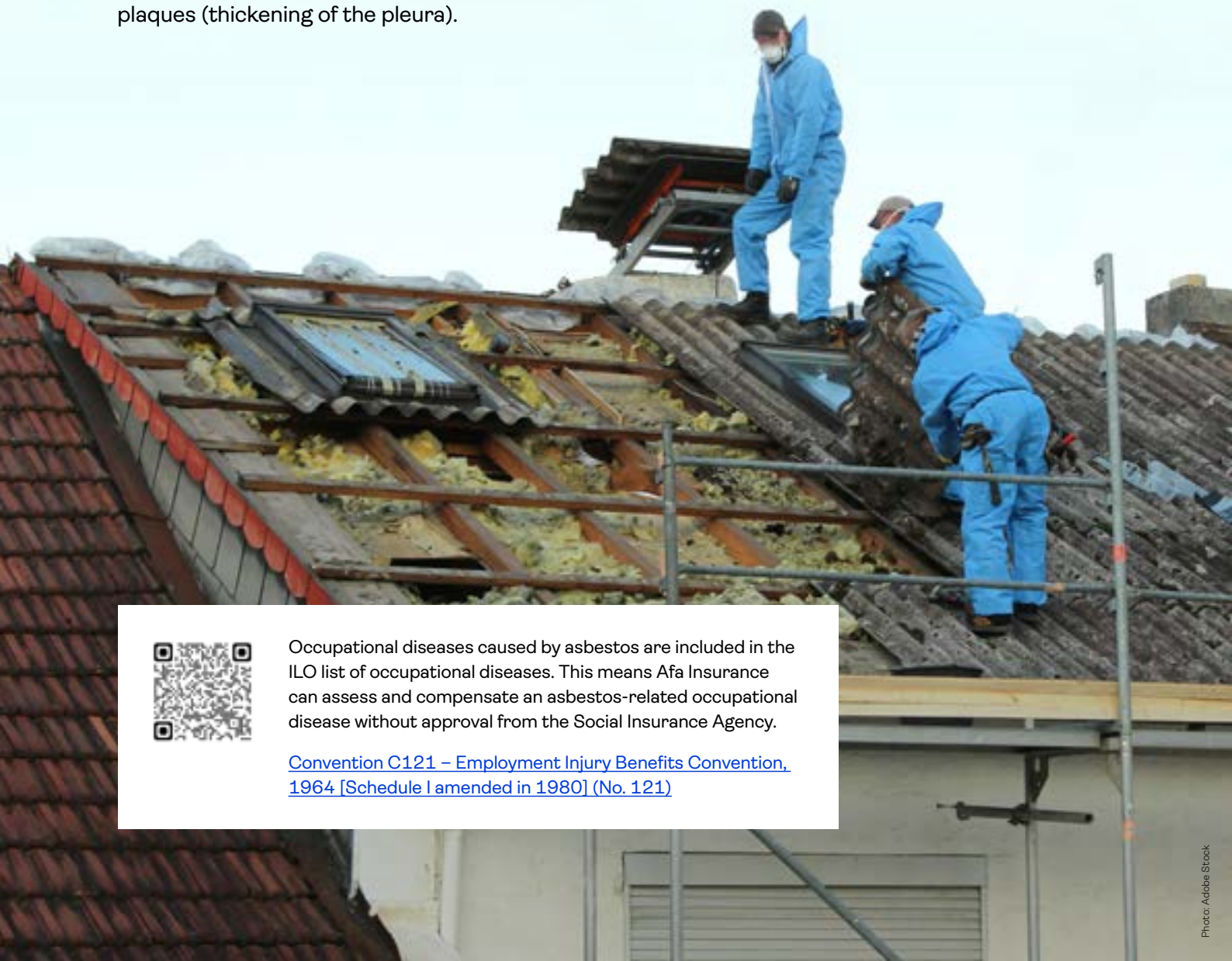
Special protective measures are required, such as protective clothing, respiratory protection, and an airlock for cleaning clothes and equipment.

Inhaling asbestos fibers can lead to serious diseases, such as mesothelioma – a rare form of pleural cancer almost exclusively caused by asbestos exposure. Other health risks include lung cancer, asbestosis (dust lung), and pleural plaques (thickening of the pleura).



Occupational diseases caused by asbestos are included in the ILO list of occupational diseases. This means Afa Insurance can assess and compensate an asbestos-related occupational disease without approval from the Social Insurance Agency.

[Convention C121 – Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 \[Schedule I amended in 1980\] \(No. 121\)](#)





Insurance rules and exceptions for asbestos-related diseases.

Handling of insurance cases for occupational diseases caused by asbestos exposure differs from other occupational diseases.

Exceptions for cancer caused by asbestos exposure:

For occupational diseases not caused by asbestos, the disease must have appeared before the age of 65 (for cases with onset date up to 2022-12-31) and before 66 (from 2023-01-01).

For cancer due to asbestos exposure, the following exceptions apply:

For employees in the private sector covered by TFA:

- ▶ Up to 2008-06-30: cancer must have appeared before age 70.
- ▶ From 2008-07-01: before age 75.
- ▶ From 2021-01-01: no age limit.

For employees covered by TFA-KP: same rules as TFA until 2019-01-01; after that, no age limit.

For employees in the public sector covered by TFA-KL:

- ▶ Up to 2008-12-31: cancer must have appeared before age 70.
- ▶ From 2009-01-01: no age limit.

For state employees under PSA: no age limit applies.

Agreement for pleural plaque injuries:

For injuries appearing up to 1985-02-20, a special agreement provided a lump sum if pleural plaques were visible on X-ray, regardless of lung function impairment. Today, compensation is mainly given if lung function is reduced by more than 15 % before age 65, regardless of onset date.

Statistics:

Approved occupational diseases caused by asbestos (2005–2023) by type of asbestos-related disease

Table 1 shows the number of approved occupational diseases divided into cancer and other diseases caused by asbestos, mainly pleural plaques. Due to confidentiality, no data is reported where the number of cases is fewer than five.

Statistics for recent years are incomplete because injuries and illnesses can be reported several years after the year of onset. During the reported period, more than half of the cases were reported in the same year as the onset year or the following year. In a few cases, injuries have been reported 10 years after the onset year. It is therefore possible to conclude that the number of occupational diseases caused by asbestos decreased during the period 2005–2023, even though additional reports may still come in for later years.

Table 1

Year of onset	Cancer	Other diseases caused by asbestos
2005	25	18
2006	18	14
2007	13	8
2008	18	9
2009	18	<5
2010	18	8
2011	25	6
2012	20	<5
2013	16	<5
2014	20	7
2015	19	6
2016	17	5
2017	12	<5
2018	16	<5
2019	9	<5
2020	5	<5
2021	7	<5
2022	8	<5
2023	8	<5
Total	292	101

Fewer than five women were affected by this occupational disease during the period; therefore, no breakdown by gender is provided.

Approved occupational diseases caused by asbestos (2005–2023) by age, total cases.

Table 2 shows work-related illnesses caused by asbestos by age group at onset. 45 percent of those affected were aged 56–64 when they became ill.

Table 2

Age group	Number of cases
–55 years	29
56–64 years	180
65–69 years	85
70–74 years	90
75+ years	9
Total	393

Approved occupational diseases caused by asbestos (2005–2023) by occupation, total cases

Table 3 shows work-related illnesses caused by asbestos by occupational group. The occupational group with the most cases was plumbers/HVAC fitters and similar. This is followed by a range of occupations within construction and industry.

Table 3

Occupational group	Number of cases
Plumbing/HVAC installers and related workers	53
Foundry workers, welders and sheet metal workers	45
Concrete, building and construction work	35
Building carpenters, interior joiners and related workers	33
Machine mechanics, machine fitters, maintenance mechanics and machine repairers	31
Electrical work	28
Engineers and technicians	25
Motor vehicle mechanics and vehicle repairers	18
Assemblers, metal, rubber and plastic products	14
Painters	13
Bricklayers/masons and related workers	9
Blacksmiths and toolmakers	7
Firefighters	5
Truck drivers and related workers	5
Other machine and process operators at steel and metal works	5
Other occupational groups	67
Total	393



Typical cases

- ▶ **Asbestos-related cancer**
Male plumber, diagnosed at age 70–74.
- ▶ **Pleural plaques
(thickening of the lining of the lungs)**
Male plumber, diagnosed at age 56–64.

Preventive measures

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's exposure limits for asbestos exposure were lowered as of 19 December 2025. Among other things, this will lead to that more workers who work with asbestos will undergo medical examinations.

More information:

[Asbestos – Swedish Work Environment Authority](#)



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