

Occupational Conditions

Occupational conditions are abnormal health conditions or laboratory findings caused by or related to exposures occurring in the workplace. While there are numerous conditions related to occupational exposures, such as work-related asthma, in Texas, most of the conditions are not reportable. Asbestosis and silicosis are two of the serious occupational conditions that are reportable in Texas.

Asbestos consists of six naturally occurring fibrous minerals that are strong, flexible, and resistant to chemical and thermal degradation. Asbestos can form microscopic-size particles when handled, particles that can remain in the air where they are easily inhaled into the lungs. Asbestosis is a lung condition caused by inhalation of these small asbestos fibers and occurs mainly in people who work with structural insulation, fireproofing, and friction materials (brake linings). Although the use of asbestos-containing products has dramatically decreased in recent years, it is still found in many settings and continues to pose a health risk to workers and their families.

Silicosis is an irreversible but preventable lung condition caused by the inhalation of very fine crystalline silica or silica dust. Inhalation of silica dust is most commonly associated with mining, sandblasting, stone cutting, masonry, and drywall work. In addition to silicosis, exposure to silica also has been associated with the development of lung cancer, pulmonary tuberculosis, and airways diseases. These exposures also may be related to the development of autoimmune disorders, chronic renal disease, and other adverse effects.

From 2004 to 2009 the burden of asbestosis and silicosis in Texas, as measured both by age-adjusted hospital discharge rates and age-adjusted mortality rates have been decreasing. Implementation of asbestos and silica related regulations, improved workplace practices, and the overall decreased use of asbestos products could in part be responsible for the observed decreases.

