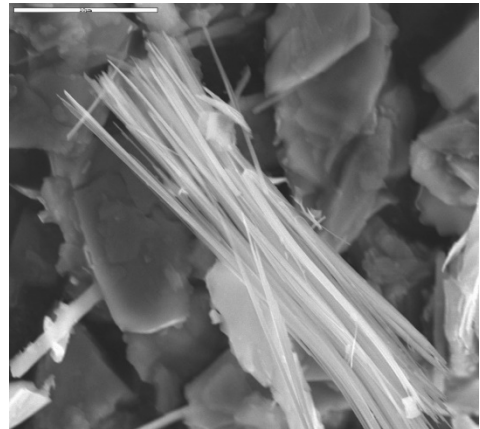


Getting the Word Out in Wisconsin: Mesothelioma is Not Going Away

Mesothelioma is rare but understood to be linked to asbestos exposure--even at low levels of workplace exposure. Wisconsin rates of mesothelioma have been higher than national rates through 2010. In 2018, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WDHS) looked at 17 more years of mesothelioma cases and found that rates were still higher than the rest of the nation. Media and worker outreach encouraged worker awareness of both recognized and emerging, lower-level sources of occupational asbestos hazards.

The Challenge

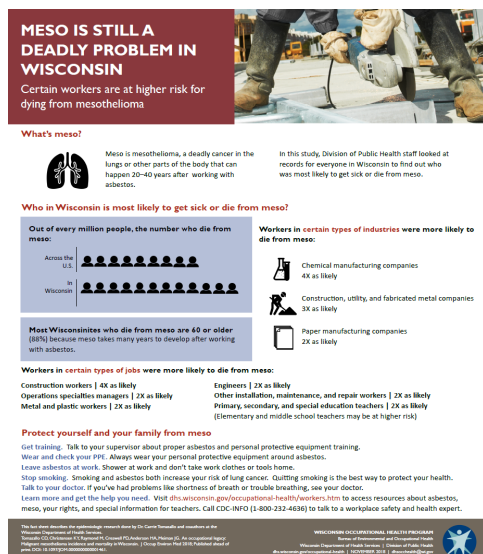
Because previous rates of mesothelioma in Wisconsin were higher than national rates, WDHS conducted a study of mesothelioma incidence and death rates during 1997–2013 and compared to national data. Since more information was needed to find out which worker groups were most affected, industry and occupation from Wisconsin cancer registry and death certificate data were coded using NIOSH's Industry and Occupation Computerized Coding System (NIOCCS).



Asbestos fiber photo: US Geological Survey

The Response

WDHS found that mesothelioma incidence and death rates in Wisconsin during this period were 20-30% higher than US rates during the same time. Workers in construction and extraction were at higher risk, and there was evidence that workers in some lower-exposure occupations, like teachers, were at higher risk. These findings were published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (JOEM) in December 2018 and featured on JOEM's Facebook page in January 2019. To get the message out to a wider group of stakeholders, we created a fact sheet in English and Spanish, presented a poster at the Wisconsin Asbestos Conference in December, and added asbestos resources to the WDHS Occupational Health webpage.



The Impact

The WDHS mesothelioma poster and fact sheet were shared with nearly 300 attendees at the Wisconsin Asbestos Conference, and continue to be disseminated on the WDHS Occupational Health webpage. In the last month, the JOEM abstract has been viewed 34 times. WDHS will continue to seek opportunities to educate and inform workers about these risks. Also, collaborating with the WDHS Cancer Registry and Vital Records programs increased their awareness of the importance of collecting industry and occupation.

For more information, visit
dhs.wisconsin.gov/occupational-health