

Title *

Prevalence of Asbestos-Related Disease Among Workers in Sri Lanka

Abstract *

A study was undertaken to understand the prevalence of asbestos-related disease among exposed workers in Sri Lanka, a country with poor reporting of occupational illnesses. Radiographic testing was done on 230 volunteers with documented exposure to asbestos through a variety of occupational activities. All radiographs were read by one of two experienced radiologists. Overall, some 17.4% were abnormal with 7% demonstrating fibrosis and the remainder showing a variety of other conditions. Common exposures include: making asbestos construction materials, construction work, workers doing building demolition, tsunami clean-up, the manufacture of asbestos brakes and other consumer products, shipyard work, and others. For this study those included were manufacturing workers, construction workers, tsunami clean-up workers, those who demolished old buildings and a few others. About 2/3rds were construction workers. The mean age was 40.5 years. 40% were smokers. Of the 16 individuals with fibrosis the range of years of exposure were less than 5 years (1 positive individual), 9 positive of those with 5-20 years, and 7 positive with 21 or more years. Interestingly, the largest number of cases were among tsunami clean-up workers and demolition workers with 6 each. Although construction workers made up the largest group, only 1 was positive. This is the first known study documenting asbestos disease in Sri Lanka and of special interest is the finding of high rates among those doing clean-up and demolition work. These rates are similar to findings in other developing countries.

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