

# Occupations

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## Electricians & Asbestos Exposure / Mesothelioma

In the construction and building renovation industry, electricians are among those who risk [exposure to asbestos](#) in the course of doing their jobs. [Asbestos exposure](#) can cause disabling or fatal diseases such as [asbestosis](#), [lung cancer](#), [gastrointestinal cancer](#) and [mesothelioma](#), a form of cancer that affects the membranes covering the lungs and body organs. From 1990 to 1999, the most frequently listed industry recorded on U.S. death certificates of asbestosis victims age 15 and older was the construction industry, with 24% of death certificates listing construction; 4.4% of all asbestosis deaths in that age range in the 1990s were electricians or former electricians. Likewise, a large number of [mesothelioma victims](#) work or worked in construction industry. A 1995 study in the Britain similarly found building workers, including electricians, to be at greatest risk of contracting mesothelioma.

In addition to its well-known use as a fire-retardant and heat insulator, asbestos was also used as a reinforcing or binding agent in plastics and cement. As such, asbestos was used in [building materials](#) including plaster, drywall materials, floor tiles and roofing products, as well as insulation. In addition, electric wiring insulation, electrical panel partitions and electrical cloth can all contain asbestos, depending on when they were manufactured.

Electricians are trained to install, connect, check, and keep up electrical systems for such uses as heating and cooling, security, and lighting. They may also be responsible for installing and maintaining electronic controls in machinery.

Some electricians specialize in construction work, where job duties often include installing the wiring systems of new buildings as well upgrading existing electrical systems. Those who specialize in maintenance work generally are responsible for the upkeep of existing electrical systems and equipment.

In commercial and factory jobs, construction electricians must often deal with conduit (pipes or tubing) in which wires are run. In the past, such conduit was often manufactured with or wrapped in asbestos. since asbestos is a good insulator that does not conduct

electricity. In residential projects, wiring is often strung along and through floors, walls and ceilings, which in the past often contained asbestos-containing materials such as insulation, tiles, and drywall compound.

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Maintenance electricians today may still be exposed to asbestos because of its presence in buildings constructed before 1980. Whether they are rewiring a business and working near asbestos insulation or installing a new ceiling fan and cutting holes in asbestos popcorn ceiling tiles, the chance of asbestos exposure is often a risk. Electricians who perform maintenance in large factories may work on motors, transformers, generators, and electronic controllers, some of which contain asbestos in their housings.

In 2006, an [Ohio](#) appeals court ruled that General Motors knew an electrician who worked as a contractor doing repairs from 1953 to 1990 was in danger from asbestos in the insulation on steam pipes and in wiring. A lower court had agreed with GM's argument that being an electrician is inherently dangerous and that they did not have responsibility for informing him of the [asbestos risks](#). The appeals court, however, ruled that breathing asbestos dust was not a danger that the plaintiff was aware of at the time. The appeals court's decision meant the retired electrician could seek damages relating to his mesothelioma from GM.

In 2007, the family of a California electrician and construction subcontractor who died from [mesothelioma](#) settled with six defendants for \$2.3 million before their wrongful death case went to trial. The defendants, Georgia-Pacific, Union Carbide, Kelly-Moore Paint, Kaiser Gypsum, Hamilton Materials, and CertainTeed, were accused of failing to warn the plaintiff about the hazards associated with asbestos exposure and of not protecting him from that exposure. He had worked for more than 40 years as an electrician and subcontractor before his death in 2005.

Diseases associated with asbestos exposure generally do not appear for 20 or more years after initial exposure, so even people who haven't worked as an electrician in many years may still be at risk for developing [mesothelioma](#) or another asbestos-related

exposure with their doctor and to receive regular check-ups for any signs of asbestos-related disease.

## 'Electricians & Asbestos Exposure / Mesothelioma' Resources:

U.S. Department of Labor.  
["Electricians"](#).  
**Accessed:** 21 August 2007

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Centers for Disease Control.  
["Asbestosis and Related Exposures"](#).  
**Accessed:** 20 August 2007

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National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.  
["Continuing increase in mesothelioma mortality in Britain"](#).  
**Accessed:** 20 August 2007

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. ["Asbestos Containing Materials"](#).  
**Accessed:** 21 August 2007

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Court of Appeals Ohio. ["Journal Entry and Opinion No. 86837"](#).  
**Accessed:** 21 August 2007

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Asbestos News. ["Electrician Family Obtains \\$2.3 Million Settlement"](#).  
**Accessed:** 21 August 2007

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**RELATED RESOURCES:**

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