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Hazard Alert

Auto mechanics risk exposure to hazardous asbestos dust

A worker was using compressed air to clear debris off a trailer's brake shoes. The airborne dust that resulted drew the attention of other workers. A lab analysis confirmed that the brake material contained 20 to 30 percent chrysotile asbestos, which is the most common form of asbestos.

Asbestos was never banned from automotive materials such as brake shoes, brake pads, and clutch plates. When employers are not sure if these products contain asbestos, they must implement control measures to protect workers. Auto mechanics who perform brake and clutch repairs risk exposure to brake and clutch dust that may contain asbestos fibres. Once suspended in the air, asbestos fibres can be inhaled. Prolonged exposure to asbestos dust can cause chronic lung disease or even lung cancer.

Safe work practices:

- Do not use compressed air, brushes, or other "dry" means to remove dust from friction materials that may contain asbestos.
- Post signs in work areas to inform workers of the hazards associated with automotive friction materials. Include the required precautions for handling those materials.
- Develop and enforce safe work procedures to minimize generating airborne dust. Suitable procedures include a HEPA-filtered vacuum enclosure system or low-pressure spray equipment with a basin to catch run-off.
- Ensure that workers exposed to dust from friction materials wear appropriate personal protective equipment — including disposable coveralls and at least HEPA-filtered dual-cartridge half-face respirators.
- Dispose of waste material that may be contaminated with asbestos as required.
- Clean up any asbestos-contaminated tools, equipment, and work surfaces.

Never use compressed air to remove dust from automotive friction materials. Even if the worker here was wearing a respirator, others would still be exposed to airborne asbestos dust.

For asbestos-specific workplace requirements, see Sections 6.1–6.32 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.

Industries: Auto service, repair, and recycling

WorkSafeBC has a wide range of health and safety information. For assistance and information on workplace health and safety, call toll-free within B.C. 1 888 621-SAFE (7233) or visit our web site at WorkSafeBC.com.

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