# How Veterans and Mesothelioma Connect

Mesothelioma is a rare cancer, affecting around 3,000 Americans each year, and it's only scientific cause is asbestos. Veterans comprise the largest group of people with this disease, and they should know why this is so.

For decades, asbestos was a desirable substance for construction and insulation jobs. It's a fire-resistant mineral and is cheap to produce. The United States military, in particular, relied on asbestos to build ships, aircrafts, vessels, barracks and more.

Asbestos' ability to prevent fires made it appealing — but it's cancer-causing characteristics made it dangerous.

Any veteran who worked with asbestos was put in harm's way. Shipyards, for instance, were rampant with asbestos. Boiler rooms included the mineral. Even people who just spent time in barracks, ships or planes may have been exposed due to loose fibers entering the air.

## What Veterans Can Do About Mesothelioma

So what should veterans do?

For anyone who's yet to be diagnosed, they should visit their primary physician and get tested. There are three types of mesothelioma — pleural, peritoneal and pericardial — and each has unique symptoms. The mesothelioma symptoms to watch for include:

- Chest, lower back or abdominal pain
- Coughing
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing
- Fluid buildup in the chest or abdomen regions
- Weight loss
- Bowel issues
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Irregular heart rhythm

These effects could be a sign of mesothelioma, or they could indicate a more common illness. A physician can conduct imaging tests — such as X-rays and CT scans — to see if there are any irregularities.

For veterans who have been diagnosed with mesothelioma, there is hope. Mesothelioma specialists can treat their disease with surgery, chemotherapy or radiation. In fact, two of the top VA hospitals (Boston and Los Angeles) have mesothelioma specialists on staff.

Veterans with mesothelioma can also get financial help through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Disability Compensation is available to veterans with mesothelioma, and they qualify for a 100 percent disability rating. By filing a VA claim, veterans can more easily cover the cost of treatment or reduce debt caused by their disease.