

Automotive Enthusiasts Should be Aware of Asbestos Risk

When people mention asbestos, we often think of a hazard of many years ago that we no longer need to be concerned with. However, even as most asbestos products were banned in the late 1970's by the Environmental Protection Agency and Consumer Product Safety Commission, many of these products still exist in industrial equipment, home construction, and yes, even older auto parts. Knowing where you may encounter these products and how to handle them can prevent a potentially life-threatening exposure to asbestos.

Asbestos was used in thousands of products before production was halted. Asbestos proved to be an efficient and inexpensive insulation material. It was also very durable and its fibers could generally be included in all construction compounds. Among the more common uses of asbestos was in brake pads and friction linings in automobiles built prior to 1980.

Obviously, brake pads and brake linings generate a great deal of heat as friction is generated. The asbestos in these linings counteracted this heat and kept the pads intact and resistant to the temperature increase. Intact asbestos products do not pose a significant hazard. However, when they are modified or disturbed, they often release harmful fibers into the surrounding air supply.

Older brake pads and linings likely contain asbestos and should be treated as such. If modifying an older vehicle it is important to note if the brake pads appear very old or damaged. In these cases, it is much more important that they be handled with the appropriate protective equipment. In some cases, if the material is very compromised, it may make sense to speak with an asbestos consultant to determine a course of action.

In recent years there has been a rising incidence of [mesothelioma](#), an aggressive asbestos-related cancer, in former auto manufacturers and auto repair workers. In most cases these cancers are directly attributed to occupational asbestos exposures. Options for [mesothelioma treatment](#) and therapies for other asbestos-related health complications are extremely limited. Most patients face a prognosis of between 6 and 18 months.

Luckily we don't employ asbestos in auto parts anymore and health complications in auto workers related to asbestos exposure should not be a problem going forward. But these materials are still in older vehicles and should be approached with extreme caution. Serious health conditions related to asbestos exposure are entirely preventable if people are aware of the materials they are working with and how to handle them.