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How working in an oil refinery may increase your risk of asbestos exposure by [Glenn Farrier](#)

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As you may know, working in an oil refinery including taking on many dangerous risk factors. Some are more prevalent than others, but it has quickly become established that asbestos exposure has been and still remains a leading health concern within the oil industry.

If you are unfamiliar with the background of asbestos exposure in the workplace here are some of the key factors. Asbestos is a heat resistant, flame retardant and is virtually impervious to many chemical reactions. It was used widely within the oil and many construction and chemical industries due to its ability to improve employee safety. Few people know that it is actually a rock which is soft and pliable enough to be able to be used in everything from protective eye-wear, gloves and overalls to insulating pipes and other larger industrial equipments.

While all this sounds fantastic, it was only recently that a major problem was uncovered which greatly outweighed many of the positive benefits listed above. For starters, it is highly carcinogenic. It is also highly corrosive and over time, fibers from clothing and machinery have proven to break down into tiny airborne particles which destroy the respiratory system. As the wearer, or person in the immediate area, these fibers break down and are inhaled leading to a wide variety of medical complications. Over time, the particles collect and cause a chain reaction within the human body. It is one of the leading causes of mesothelioma – a deadly asbestos cancer.

There was a major refinery accident which took place in Texas City, Texas. The company admitted that when Hurricane Rita brushed past the Texas coast, the winds caused "significant wind damage" to the refinery's insulation, carrying significant amounts of asbestos from the plant's 27 mile steam system. It is also likely that in addition to potential injuries to the employees who suffered direct exposure, many inhabitants of the local town will suffer also indirect or what is also called – "secondary" exposure.

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Over the a long term investigation, a group within the United Kingdom carried out a study tracking the health of over forty-five thousand oil refinery and petroleum distribution workers. There were several key criteria which had to be met in order to participate in the research. These were as following:

- The worker had to have been employed within either industry.
- They must have been employed for a minimum of twelve months between 1946 and 1971.

The results reported that those who worked with an oil refinery had – "significantly elevated" – rates of the lethal mesothelioma and melanoma compared to people within the general population.

Why are oil refinery workers in a higher risk category?

Due to the hazardous nature of oil refineries, asbestos was an essential part of equipment and machinery. Asbestos was first implemented as a safety tool to help lower other risks from working under dangerous conditions, such as fires, heat damage, and protective clothing. Its versatility meant that it was used in almost everything oil workers required. Oil companies were also one of the founding industries to rely on asbestos as a valuable material in their work process and as the

oil industries boomed during the industrial revolution, they were also one of the highest employers of their time. This meant that statistically, many more people were exposed compared to other industries.

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If you have worked in an a [oil field](#) and feel you may have been potentially exposed to asbestos, it is best to contact a a [qualified mesothelioma lawyer](#) who will help you understand your rights, guide you through the process and answer any questions you might have.

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