

Asbestosis: My Pain from Asbestosis

Rinzo Uno

*Japan Association of Mesothelioma and Asbestos Related-Diseases Victims and Their Families,
Japan*

Abstract

I worked at a shipyard in Yokosuka, 50km south of Tokyo, for 37 years building ships. I also repaired ships for 10 years. Both jobs gave plenty of opportunities for exposure to asbestos. Fixing ships was a busy job so I often worked until late at night in a dusty environment. When construction of a new ship was nearly completed, we often had to modify several parts of the ship so I had no choice but to remove asbestos used for insulation. However, we were supplied masks only from 1978.

20 years ago, a society for victims of pneumoconiosis was established, assisted by a nationwide pneumoconiosis victims' association and workers' unions. I was 50 years old then and became one of the officials of that society. Twelve years before, I was diagnosed with pneumoconiosis. I always bring tissues and trash bags in my briefcase for my cough and phlegm. Every year, about 5 members die from mesothelioma or lung cancer. There are more than 17,000 pneumoconiosis victims in Japan.

I usually have 4 coughing fits every night. Since my coughs are very close together, I can't ingest any medicines. My wife rubs my back and sometimes asks me if we should call an ambulance but I am not able to reply during a fit. During my two-hour fit, she just watches me and I feel more dead than alive.

Actually, it is not only my pain but also the struggle of my family. When I have a light fit while riding on a train, my neighbors sometimes change their seats. This makes me feel very lonely.

I have changed medicines and started using an inhalant 3 years ago. I do not want my children and grandchildren to experience my pain. In Japan, a ban on asbestos use should be introduced immediately. We Japanese always take action slowly. I wonder whether this might not be due to laziness on the part of the Government. The incubation period of asbestos related diseases is 30 to 40 years so it is actually difficult for victims to demand compensation in our legal system. A better system should be introduced to rescue victims.

Please stop killing people this way. My friends are dying one after the other from mesothelioma and lung cancer. And, I cannot forget even for an instant that I also carry a time bomb of asbestos in my lungs.