

Asbestos Related Findings among Construction Workers and Educational Effects on Prevention

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Abstract

A comprehensive occupational safety and health program has been launched with the objectives of preventing occupational accidents and diseases, early detection of relevant diseases, assistance in compensation claims by victims, and training in preventive measures in particular for self-employed workers and small businesses. The trade union, the Construction National Health Insurance Association that is affiliated to the union, the Himawari Clinic and the Tokyo Occupational Safety and Health Center started a joint program in 1996. The Tokyo Joint Association of General Federation of Construction Workers' Union organizes 150,000 construction workers, mainly self-employed workers and small businesses working in small construction sites for wooden buildings or in large construction sites as sub-contractors. Initial activities included joint surveys of construction sites and health surveillance of construction workers. For example, to detect occupational respiratory diseases, we have annually checked about 6,000 chest X-ray films of construction workers against the Japanese Standard Pneumoconiosis Films supplied by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. As a result, we found that workers with 0/1 small opacities and pleural plaques accounted for 13%, and those with 1/0 small opacities accounted for 0.6%.

In 2000, we started educational programs about the prevention of occupational respiratory diseases. For members with abnormal chest X-ray findings, we conducted workshops about the prevention of occupational respiratory diseases and the improvement of working conditions. The workshops were held 20 times per year from 2002. We used newly designed teaching materials comprising photographs and video clips of various jobs as well as instructions about the measurement of total dust and asbestos concentrations. The workshops have proven effective for construction workers in enhancing the recognition of risk due to dust and asbestos and changing work practices of dusty jobs. In a prominent example, workers adopted a local exhaust system and personal protection in cutting a dry wall, and a drastic reduction in dust concentrations during work resulted.