

Prefectural High Schools' Asbestos Issues

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Abstract

A total of 51 facilities in 46 public high school buildings in Kanagawa Prefecture, including gymnasiums and sports-related facilities, use asbestos felt as a construction material. The product used, "Felton R-30," consists of corrugated steel roofing sheet lined with 10 mm thick asbestos material. The composition of this material is 85% or more chrysotile asbestos with 15% or less sodium silicate. Sodium silicate is used to bind the asbestos, but it deteriorates with time and eventually becomes useless, causing the asbestos felt to detach easily from the steel sheet.

Kanagawa Prefectural High School Teachers' Union conducts inspections for airborne asbestos at the facilities that have been found problematic by visual checks. The characteristics of asbestos felt, however, make it hard to express enough numerical data to show its airborne hazard. There are some cases where students are exposed to airborne asbestos during class hours, when asbestos felt comes off from the steel sheet. It is a critical health hazard for the students. The total removal of asbestos from school buildings, which is our hope, has not been carried out yet in Kanagawa, due to the financial hardship of the prefectural government, as is the case for other municipalities across Japan. Under such circumstances, sprayed vermiculite and perlite materials were identified at 121 sites of 78 facilities. Currently those materials are being examined to see whether they are contaminated with asbestos or not. In this way, asbestos issues at education facilities are still left unattended in many cases. This is a status report of the issue.