**Part 2: Asbestos: what is asbestos?**

What is asbestos, asbestos is the name given to a group of fibro-silicate minerals. It’s broken up into two subgroups called the serpentine and the amphibole

In the serpentine group there is only one member, chrysotile a white asbestos. The amphibole group includes crocidolite which is blue asbestos, amosite which is brown asbestos and some other less common forms that aren’t found in Australia or only very very rarely.

The effects of the asbestos depend to some extent on the nature of the fibres. The serpentine fibres are made of magnesium silicate they’re spiral fibres which are flexible and as a result of their chemicals they can be slightly more easily cleared from the lungs.

On the other hand, the amphibole group are a complex iron and magnesium silicate which forms very straight fibres and when they break, they tend to cleave longitudinally that means they break along the length forming smaller and smaller and narrower and narrower fibres which are extremely durable and are more likely to be able to penetrate into the lungs. These differences cause differences in the health effects which we will discuss later.

Asbestos is a natural fibre found in the ground and here we have a piece of rock where the asbestos strands are demonstrated. It’s got some properties which are widely used in ship-building in the chemical and power industries for lagging and for gaskets. In friction products for example in clutches and brakes in cars and in the building industry where it was used for both insulation and to make fibro-cement products. It’s been widely used in the past and its use has only been phased out since the 1980s so that means unfortunately there’s still plenty of it around.

In the past the hazard wasn’t recognised and even in 1896 it was advertised as a bedding material I’m sure we wouldn’t use it that way today

Presentation Ended