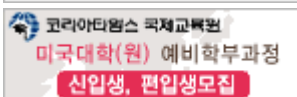
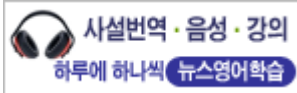


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## Asbestos Regulations Tightened

By Lee Hyo-sik  
Staff Reporter

The government seeks to strictly regulate **asbestos** as a harmful substance next year to ease public health concerns over the widely used cancer-causing construction material.

Once designated, the import, manufacture and use of **asbestos** will be strictly limited.

The Ministry of Environment said Monday that it is considering ways of restricting the material after consultations with the related government agencies and gathering opinions from businesses that manufacture and use **asbestos**, including construction firms and automakers.

The decision to restrict the use of the material instead of issuing an outright ban was made in consideration of its widespread use as acoustic or thermal insulation, fireproofing and in other building materials.

**Asbestos** has been regulated under the industrial safety and health act but a large quantity of the substance is still in use, putting public health and the environment at serious risk, a ministry official said.

“We have decided to reinforce the law on **asbestos** and once it is designated as a highly restricted substance, it will be much harder to import, manufacture and utilize,” the official added.

The material has been banned for industrial use in Europe for decades and last year in Japan and Australia.

Most other countries also prohibited its use or importation as a number of health studies have found that **asbestos** causes severe health problems, such as cancer, when inhaled.

Patients suffer mostly from lung cancer and pleura cancer

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and the chance of recovery is very low.

Many Korean workers were exposed to **asbestos** during the industrialization period in the 1970s-80s and it takes some 20 to 30 years for it to develop into cancer.

Around 14,000 tons of **asbestos** were imported last year with 3,200 more tons imported by August of this year.

The total amount of imports over the past four decades surpasses 2 million tons. The government banned five of the six types of **asbestos**, three in 2000 and two in 2003.

The other one, dubbed white **asbestos**, is still currently in use as the government claims that it is less harmful and have many advantages as a construction material.

It said that there are not many materials that can replace white **asbestos**, adding that similar materials such as glass fiber are too expensive and lag far behind white **asbestos** in durability and fire resistance.

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