

# The link between asbestos and pleural cancer in offshore petroleum workers

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Men who work offshore and have been in contact with asbestos in their working environment have a higher risk of developing pleural cancer.

The risk of pleural cancer may also be linked to having worked in an [environment](#) containing asbestos before beginning work offshore. These are among the findings of a [new study](#) published in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* involving 25,000 offshore workers.

"In our study we found an association between exposure to asbestos in offshore working environments and pleural cancer in offshore petroleum workers. Findings like this can help develop measures targeted at preventing cancer but are also important when assessing whether it is the actual offshore work that is the cause of the cancer," says researcher Leon McLaren Berge of the Department of Biostatistics at the Institute of Basic Medical Sciences.

## **Estimating the risk among Norwegian offshore workers**

The research group EpiStat at the Department of Biostatistics collaborates with the Cancer Registry of Norway on research into [cancer risk](#) among offshore workers. In 2022, the group was awarded 10 million kroners to study other diseases that offshore workers can be exposed to through their profession.

The fact that asbestos can cause pleural cancer has been known for a long time, says Berge.

"But our study is the first to estimate this risk among Norwegian offshore workers using detailed and expert-assessed data on asbestos exposure. However, based on a coarser categorization of the offshore workers' work history outside offshore work, the risk of pleural cancer may also be linked to their potential exposure to [asbestos](#) before they began work in the offshore industry. This is an important discovery which contributes to our understanding of the disease risks faced by such

workers," he says.

In recent years, there has been a good deal of focus on oil pioneers and whether they have fallen ill because of their work offshore and should therefore receive compensation.

**More information:** Leon Alexander McLaren Berge et al, Exposure to fibres and risk of pleural mesothelioma in the Norwegian Offshore Petroleum Workers cohort, *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (2024). [DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2024-109424](https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2024-109424)

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