

[00:00:03.21] - Narrator

Take a look across the inlet, where asbestos was loaded for export. Workers hauled it, breathed it, took it home, later to die from it, by the thousands.

[00:00:20.02] - Doug R. Taylor

It's actually silky to the touch until you look at it under a microscope, and then it's barbed and sharp, but unseen without sunlight illuminating. It's unseen. Thousands of particles of asbestos floating in the air.

[00:00:37.04] - Lee Loftus

I was working in the shipyards. The sun would come through that window. You could see the whole shop, a huge shop, and all you saw was all this stuff just floating in the air.

[00:00:49.12] - Narrator

Asbestos was and is the magic mineral. Floors, walls, ceilings, roofing, oven mitts, hair dryers, crayons, talcum powder. Cheap, plentiful, easy to mine, and lethal to breathe.

[00:01:08.16] - Lee Loftus

As I look across that harbour, that means something to me because Cassiar Asbestos produced asbestos for decades and decades, and they shipped it down to the port across the way here. And you would be able to look at that pier and the pier would be chock-a-block full of asbestos, all in canvas-type bags. Then they would ship it around the world to be used in other applications and expose other workers without advising them what those hazards were. That was the place where I saw a lot of the exposures that were unnecessary.

[00:01:40.23] - Suzana Prpic

Asbestos was deemed to be that magic mineral, and it was meant to change the world. And it did change the world, but for all the wrong reasons. No one thought that in going to work and handling materials and doing their day-to-day jobs would make them sick 20, 30, or 40 years later. People were simply providing for their families and doing their jobs. It's heartbreaking and it has to stop.

[00:02:09.08] - Narrator

This much was known in 1947: Once in the lungs, asbestos fibres stay there, a time bomb. One exposure can bring on terminal cancer decades later, when there's nobody left to blame.

[00:02:26.11] - Lee Loftus

This is personal for me. Third-generation asbestos worker. It's impacted my family, my co-workers. I've delivered eulogies, and I've helped many people arrange for their last days. That's not something I planned for when I decided to be a construction worker.

[00:02:43.20] - Narrator

The reckoning has just begun. Asbestos exposure is already the largest on-the-job killer in Canada. More than 150,000 have already been exposed. Canada banned asbestos in 2018. You do the math.

[00:03:03.20] - Craig Lehto

The two words "magic" and "lethal" really describe the legacy of asbestos well. And it really describes the journey that we've had collectively with asbestos through the decades.

[00:03:15.04] - Doug R. Taylor

It took many, many years with lots of resistance, you know, different industrial interests burying the information and people continuing to use asbestos and the different societal directions that were required to finally put an end to the use of the asbestos that was harming people, killing people.

[00:03:39.02] - Craig Lehto

The memorial will be many things to different people. For some who have lost family members or relatives or friends, it will cause them to reflect on the tragedy and it will be a true memorial to them. For others who may not have awareness of asbestos or learning about asbestos for the first time, Hopefully it gets them talking about the impacts of asbestos and spreads the awareness around the hazards that it creates. That's always the start to preventing further illness and disease.

[00:04:12.00] - Lee Loftus

When I saw the wheels and the cups and the movement and all the way it was all set up and the artwork around that, it reminded me of how that asbestos is airborne and how chaotic it is.

[00:04:27.08] - Doug R. Taylor

The spiky asbestos fibers are just a forest of spokes, which this piece is really. The frame that carries all these wheels is like a bronchial pathway. The tail of the piece is the lung-like shapes. All relates to the human body.

[00:04:48.00] - Craig Lehto

The Asbestos Memorial is so important to the convention center and Really, it's important to the history of BC and the BC workers. With our themed artwork project that we have around the building already, I believe this is a really natural fit to talk about a very poignant moment in our, in our history in BC and a salute to the workers that were exposed to asbestos. I think it fits well and we're very honoured to host this piece on our facility.

[00:05:14.09] - Suzana Prpic

It's wonderful to have all these organizations come together to make this memorial a reality. WorkSafeBC is so honoured to be part of this group to really raise awareness. It's imperative that we take this opportunity and make the positive changes so that we understand this hazard, that we understand the risk it presents, and that we have the controls in place to avoid this devastating loss in the future.

[00:05:44.04] - Lee Loftus

This location is priceless. Everybody comes down here sooner or later. Everybody gets a chance to walk around this plaza, and hopefully they'll leave here and understand that the solutions are not in place, the answers have not been completely developed, and that asbestos is still a situation and will be for decades to come.