

Scientists' shock finding about mineral wool: we've been living a lie for nearly 30 years



Illustrative photo
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MAASTRICHT – The world is struggling to come to terms with the shocking news that the safety tests conducted on mineral wool in the 1990s were incorrect. New research has raised a number of direct public health issues. The main concern is that mineral wool is now thought to cause lung disease, which is far more dangerous than cancer.

New research results into mineral wool were published in June this year. Since the 1990s, it was assumed that mineral wool was non-carcinogenic. This assumption was based on extensive tests conducted in the 1990s which proved that mineral wool was safe to use and did not contain hazardous carcinogenic substances. Some 30 years later, the results have been proven not to be true.

An illustration of the use of the insulating material known as mineral wool.



Source: Getty Images

Test results falsified

According to Gary Cartwright, a journalist for EU Today, the mineral wool on which the tests were conducted in the 1990s was tampered with. A key substance – a binding agent – was removed from the mineral wool prior to testing. This intervention provided the false test results that confirmed that

mineral wool was safe to use as an insulating material. A fact that at that time was also subsequently acknowledged by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

Different product than presented

The results of new material tests conducted by a research institute in Germany (BASF) confirmed that the results of the tests that were carried out in the 1990s were incorrect. It turns out that consumers and construction companies have been buying a completely different product than was being presented to them.

Risk of lung disease

The results of the new research raise a number of direct public health issues. As a result of these findings, several organisations and institutions that monitor the environmental and health impact of different types of materials have decided to appeal directly to the European Union. The aim is to introduce stricter rules for the handling and use of mineral wool.

The threat not only comes in the form of cancerous substances and the cancers they cause, but also in the form of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is far more dangerous than cancer. According to Dr. Marjolein Drent from the Dutch University of Maastricht, it is important to realise that ***"some types of cancers are treatable, but this form of pulmonary fibrosis is usually not."***

Mineral wool



Source: Getty Images

Three legislative solutions

According to the report in EU Today, there are three legislative solutions. The first is to re-test the mineral wool to detect the risk of cancer caused by manipulation of the product. The second is legislation to protect the health and safety of construction workers and other persons exposed to mineral wool. The purpose of this would be to provide adequate information on the risks, as well as ensure the mandatory provision and use of safety equipment in workplaces. The third is to label products to ensure that health warnings are visibly placed on all packaging.

In the 1990s, concerns about rising energy costs and global warming meant that the issue on the political agenda was "insulated" to a high degree. Unfortunately, the rush to find a replacement for asbestos not only brought about a positive result, but also a negative one in the form of an insulating substance with carcinogenic effects, an insulating material that has become an industry standard in the field of construction. Within this context, it is worth noting that it took 99 years for individual countries to intervene in the fight against asbestos.