



# Under Construction

JAN. 2010

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## Asbestos respects no trades

Many people in the building trades think only insulators and maybe a couple of other trades could be exposed to asbestos on the job. They couldn't be more wrong.

When asbestos was identified as a hazardous material in the early 1980s, it seemed to be everywhere. In the construction industry hundreds of different products had asbestos in them. Before it became a thing to avoid, asbestos was considered to be an ideal general purpose substance: durable, versatile and cheap.

It could be sprayed, spread, cut and bent. It was the perfect binding agent, filler and extender. Beside fireproofing and insulation, it might be found in joint compound, gaskets, packing material, brick, flooring, tile, roofing material, adhesives, grinding wheels, cement and a host of other products.

So many products that it was almost impossible to avoid if you worked construction twenty or more years ago. It was just another ingredient in common building products, and most tradespeople had no idea there was asbestos anywhere near them. That's the problem today.

Health issues caused by asbestos take ten to forty years to develop and people usually don't connect today's symptoms with exposure decades ago. Their memories have faded or they never knew they were exposed in the first place. As with any health issue, early treatment is the key to success, so it's very important to recognize asbestos as a potential cause lurking behind symptoms.

Only a tiny percentage of people who worked on construction sites during the asbestos years show any ill effects – but keep asbestos in mind just in case.

Since asbestos was often inhaled, respiratory illness is the most common form of asbestos-related disease. But coughs, wheezing or shortness of breath are symptoms shared by any number of illnesses, so doctors won't usually look for deeper reasons during cold and flu season, or if you're a smoker. Of course not every cough means you're seriously ill, but if your doctor doesn't know your history, asbestos isn't likely to be on a list of possible causes.



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## Asbestos-related illness takes decades to appear *continued from page one*

Think back to your early days in construction. In Canada, asbestos was still around job sites into the 1980s.

Did you mix concrete from powder, mix or sand joint compound, grind or cut bricks? Did you work with tile, floor covering or roofing material? How about plaster or stucco? Did you clean machinery or replace parts? Cut tubing or sleeves?

More important, were you on sites where any of these things were done, or other tasks too numerous to list? You didn't have to mix plaster or cut brick with asbestos in it to inhale the dust. Sheet metal workers were often up high in dust-filled air. Painters followed drywallers into sanding dust. Labourers raised dust when they cleaned up sites. And on and on.

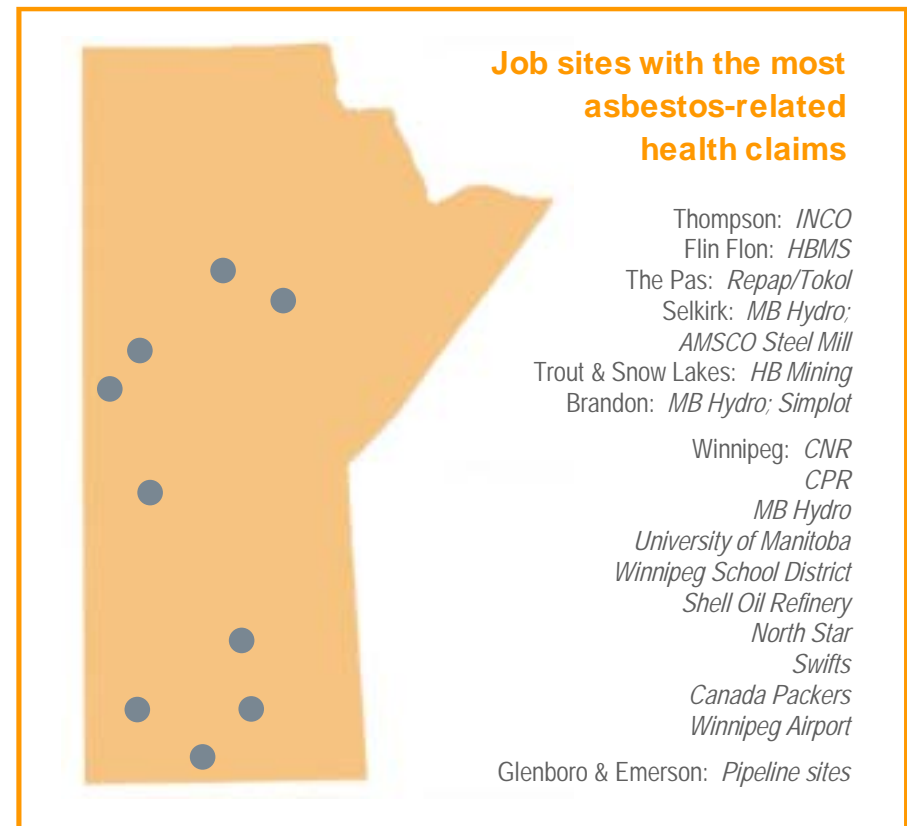
Manitoba's Workers Compensation Board recognizes that past asbestos exposure can cause illness today. It has the potential to help both active and retired construction workers with asbestos-related conditions – but only if a proper diagnosis is made first.

Asbestos-related diseases are becoming more common now because they take decades to mature. Tell your doctor about your work history. Common symptoms are almost always nothing to worry about, but why take chances? Ask for a referral to a specialist if you're having problems.

If you're found to have asbestos fibres anywhere in your body you should make a WCB claim right away. You don't have to be seriously ill to get help from workers compensation. It could be as simple as having a company cut your grass and shovel your snow because you get short of breath.

On the other hand, if you're one of the rare people who get seriously ill from asbestos exposure, the WCB can provide help over and above regular health care.

Thankfully future generations won't have to come in contact with asbestos. For those who remember it, hold on to those memories. They could be important to your future.



## Manitoba's economy a powerhouse in 2009 — and still looking good

While the rest of Canada suffered various degrees of economic hardship in 2009, and to the south the United States is still mired in the worst economic crisis in decades, Manitoba seemed like an oasis in an economic desert.

In this year of recession, only tiny Prince Edward Island bettered Manitoba's economic performance. Manitoba's Gross Domestic Product, or the value of goods and services produced, slipped only 1.6 percent, while PEI's was only -0.8 percent.



Elsewhere in the West, Saskatchewan showed a much larger GDP decline of 5.5 percent while BC weighed in at -5.1 percent. Alberta trailing the entire country with a fall of 7.9 percent — a performance almost twice as bad as Ontario's -4.1 percent.

Forecasts for next year show Manitoba's GDP firmly in the black with a 3.9% increase, putting us in the middle of the Canadian pack. Last year's hard-hit provinces are predicted to bounce back nicely, with Saskatchewan at plus 4.5 percent, B.C. up 5.0 and battered Alberta at plus 4.8 percent.

Manitoba did especially well in the unemployment arena in 2009. Our unemployment figure of 5.2 percent was only slightly behind Saskatchewan's national-best figure of 4.9 percent. The West as a whole did substantially better than Eastern Canada's average of 10.8 percent, with Alberta recording 6.5 percent and B.C. at 7.6 percent.

Next year, only slight increases in unemployment are predicted across the board, with Manitoba rising less than one point to 5.9 percent,

Saskatchewan up a little more to 5.6 percent, Alberta forecasted to be 7.1 percent and B.C. up only a fraction to 7.7 percent.

Although inflation stayed extremely low in 2009, Manitoba and Saskatchewan did pay a small price for economic prosperity with rates above the rest of the country. Saskatchewan led the pack with an increase of 1.3 percent, with Manitoba in second place at 0.8 percent. Inflation only went up 0.2 percent in B.C., while it actually went down in Alberta at -0.2 percent.

As the economy recovers in 2010, inflation is expected to creep up a little — but only a little. Manitoba should rise to 1.4 percent, with increases to 1.5 percent in Saskatchewan, the same in Alberta and up to 1.9 percent in B.C.

Overall, inflation has slowed to extremely low levels by anyone's standards. Compare this year's rates and next year's forecast to ten years ago, when one-year inflation topped 10 percent!

# What's the employment outlook for the building trades?



Executive Director  
David Martin

With Manitoba bucking the recessionary trend across the country and the world, construction employment in Manitoba will be on an upward track for 2009 and 2010, and should continue to grow for several years after that.

The federal government's stimulus package coupled with other local ICI projects are expected to push employment growth by more than five percent annually. There may be a pause in 2011 due to the winding-up of the federal stimulus package, but the construction sector is predicted to rebound beyond that and keep up moderate growth from 2012 to 2017.

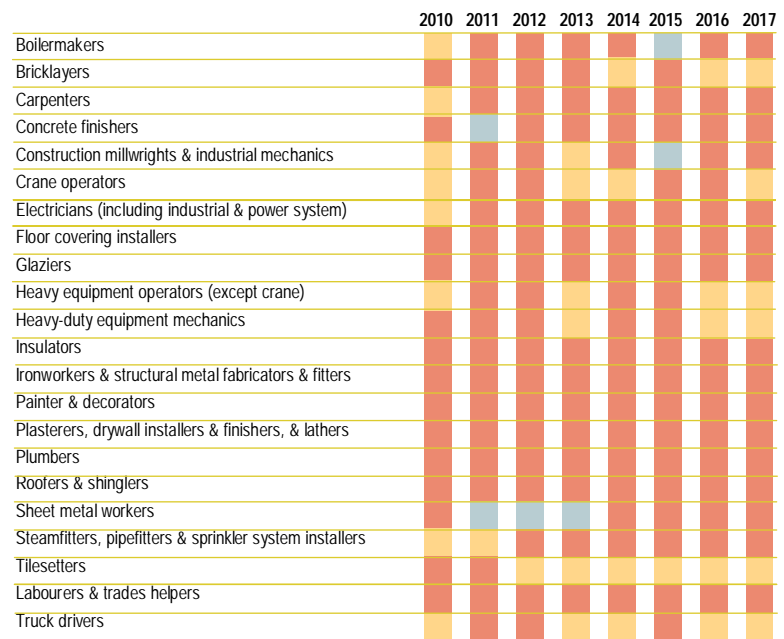
Overall, Manitoba's construction industry will show steady moderate to strong growth, producing generally prosperous times for the building trades. Manitoba has likely dodged most of the impact of the recession that has slowed development in other jurisdictions.

While Manitoba's strength through the recession is notable, other provinces such as Saskatchewan are also doing well and will be competing for skilled trades workers this year and next.

However, without even considering losing our workers to other provinces, predictions are that we will need 5000 more tradespeople over the next seven years just to meet retirements in the industry. The age profile of our tradespeople is generally a little younger than other jurisdictions, which will help limit the impact of retirements, but we have to keep up efforts to build our local pool of well-trained tradespeople.

Our strength lies in our recruitment, training and promotional programs, which should go a long way towards balancing the employment demands created by our own growing industry, and those in other provinces as Canada's recovery grows. Industry and government are working hard on upping efforts in that area, but as well as supporting new efforts we have to be careful to sustain the traditional support systems necessary to our growing construction sector. This is essential to our challenging and cyclical job market, which demands not only increased mobility, but skilled workers who are continuously improving their skills.

## Projected demand for construction tradespeople

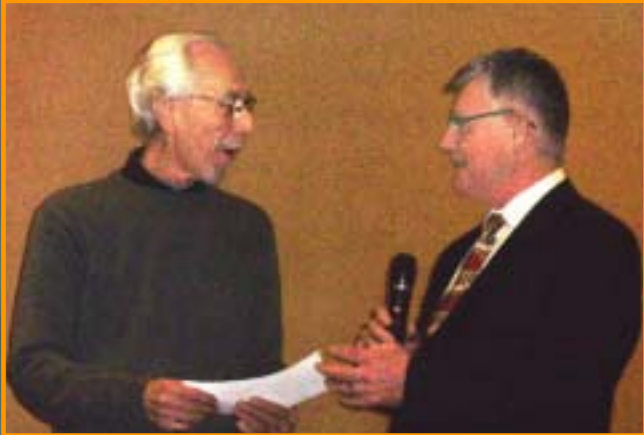


Source: Construction Sector Council

■ Workers are available to meet an increase in demand.
 ■ Availability of workers may be limited by increases in demand.
 ■ Workers are generally not available. Employers will need to compete.



# Annual Building Trades Christmas Party attracts special guests



*Kai Madsen (left), Executive Director of the Christmas Cheer Board, welcomes a \$5000 donation from MBT President Jim Murphy*



*Manitoba Labour Minister Jennifer Howard and MBT Executive Director David Martin*



*MBT rep Dave Yallits (left) recites his Christmas list for Mark White, Operating Engineers' Brandon business agent*



*Retired UA business manager John Moore and IBEW staffer Marlese Craig*



*Manitoba Apprenticeship Executive Director Scott Sinclair (left) with Apprenticeship Board Chair Leonard Harapiak*



*Manitoba Building Trades' Carol Kolodie shares a laugh with Manitoba Hydro's Don Rogolsky*

## Awareness is key to safe work in the cold

"Cold stress" is what Manitoba's Workers Compensation Board calls the negative effects of working in winter conditions. Described as the body's inability to control its internal temperature, cold stress can result in serious injury or death.

There are several situations that can put you at risk. Low temperature combined with wind. Immersion in cold water. Inadequate or improper clothing. A high level of physical activity in extreme conditions.

One of the symptoms of cold stress is frostbite. We've all felt the first stage of frostbite — a prickling or burning sensation of the skin, fingers or toes. If not reversed this can progress to extreme pain, or worse, no sensation at all if nerve endings are affected.

While frostbite is dangerous, resulting in loss of body tissue in extreme cases, hypothermia is downright deadly. Hypothermia's symptoms include a sensation of cold followed by pain, numbness, muscle weakness, confusion, slurred speech, drowsiness, and eventually coma and death. If you're working with someone

who shows these symptoms or seems to be in distress, they could literally be freezing to death.

If you think that's what's happening, move the worker to a warm area. Call 911 or any other local emergency provider. Try to get the person to move their arms and legs. Replace wet clothing with dry clothes or with blankets. Provide warm — not hot — sweet drinks.

But prevention is the best medicine for cold stress. Pay attention to the weather forecast and the conditions in your immediate area. Wear proper clothes that will keep you dry and insulated. Keep an eye on your condition and on your co-workers. Take warm-up breaks in heated shelters. (At or below -7C, heated shelters should be available close by.) Drink warm sweet drinks or soup. Keep your body moving, but when the temperature plunges limit the amount of heavy work you do.

For more information refer to Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health's thermal stress guideline at [safemanitoba.com](http://safemanitoba.com).

Recommended work periods and number of 10-minute warm-up breaks per day for work in cold conditions								
Air Temp. °C	8 km/h wind		16 km/h wind		24 km/h wind		32 km/h wind	
	Number of breaks	Max. work period	Number of breaks	Max. work period	Number of breaks	Max. work period	Number of breaks	Max. work period
-26 to -29	1	Normal	2	75 min.	3	55 min.	4	40 min.
-30 to -32	2	75 min.	3	55 min.	4	40 min.	5	30 min.
-33 to -35	3	55 min.	4	40min.	5	30 min.		
-36 to -39	4	40 min.	5	30 min.				
-40 & below	<i>Non-emergency work should stop</i>							

