

Black Lung Disease Encyclopedia Article

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Black Lung Disease

Black lung disease, also known as anthracosis or **coal** workers' pneumoconiosis, is a chronic, fibrotic lung disease of coal miners. It is caused by inhaling coal dust which accumulates in the lungs, and forms black bumps or coal macules on the bronchioles. These black bumps in the lungs give the disease its common name. Lung disease among coal miners was first described by German mineralogist Georgius Agricola in the sixteenth century and it is now a widely recognized occupational illness.

Black lung disease occurs most often among miners of anthracite (hard) coal, but it is found among soft coal miners and graphite workers as well. The disease is characterized by gradual onset—the first symptoms usually appear only after 10–20 years of exposure to coal dust. The extent and severity of the disease is clearly related to the length of this exposure. The disease also appears to be aggravated by cigarette smoking. The more advanced forms of black lung disease are frequently associated with **emphysema** or chronic **bronchitis**. There is no real treatment for this disease, but it may be controlled or its development arrested by avoiding exposure to coal dust. Black lung disease is probably the best known occupational illness in the United States. In some regions, more than 50% of coal miners develop the disease after 30 or more years on the job.

See Also

Fibrosis; Respiratory Diseases

Resources

Books

Moeller, D. W. *Environmental Health*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.