

Help on the way for vets with asbestos illnesses

**By Chuck Arndt
For The News-Chronicle**

It's good to see Congress doing the right thing for American veterans. For too long, too many Americans have died from horrible diseases caused by exposure to asbestos in the military and at work. Finally, some in Congress are taking steps that could bring relief to the innocent victims of asbestos exposure.

Today, everyone knows that exposure to asbestos can cause asbestosis, mesothelioma and even lung cancer. But over a good part of the last century, tens of thousands of workers were exposed to asbestos. Veterans have been especially hard hit by this national tragedy, since the Navy used asbestos aboard most of its ships from World War II up through the Vietnam War.

What's worse, the current system for compensating victims is hopelessly broken. The court system is snarled with plaintiffs who aren't even sick. Far too many victims die waiting for compensation. And of those who do live to see an award, many end up with only pennies on the dollar. Lawyers and court fees take the rest.

Luckily, some in Congress are finally stepping up to the plate to help victims. A bipartisan group of senators has put forward the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act, also known as the FAIR Act. The bill has already been approved by the Judiciary Committee and the full Senate is expected to take it up soon.

The FAIR Act would establish a trust fund, financed by the same companies that are getting sued for exposing workers to asbestos, to disperse money to victims. Unlike the current system, the trust fund would provide relief to sick victims quickly, efficiently and reliably.

Victims would simply submit their medical records to the trust fund administrators. If they're sick, they'll get paid. Sicker victims would receive more money.

Today, some victims who receive settlements can't get additional compensation if they get sicker. The FAIR Act fixes that problem so victims will be able to get more money if their condition deteriorates.

As a veteran and a Wisconsin voter, I hope that our senators, Herb Kohl and Russell Feingold, will put the interests of working-class asbestos victims ahead of the interests of lawyers and vote for the FAIR Act when it comes to the Senate floor.

Asbestos victims and their families deserve nothing less.

Chuck Arndt is a past state commander of the Wisconsin VFW. He is also a Past VFW Big 10 Conference Chairman and National Council Member. He lives in Eagle River and can be reached at 715-479-2080.