ASBESTOS

(Data in metric tons unless otherwise noted)

Domestic Production and Use: Asbestos has not been mined in the United States since 2002 because of the decline in the U.S. asbestos markets associated with health and liabilities issues. The United States is dependent on imports to meet manufacturing needs. Asbestos consumption in the United States was estimated to be 400 tons, based on asbestos imports through July 2014. The chloralkali industry accounted for an estimated 88% of U.S. consumption. The remainder was used in coatings and compounds, plastics, roofing products, and unknown applications.

Salient Statistics—United States:	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014[e]
Production (sales), mine	—	—	—	—	—
Imports for consumption	1,040	1,180	1,610	772	201
Exports[1]	171	169	47	27	—
Consumption, estimated	1,040	1,180	1,020	772	400
Price, average value, dollars per ton[2]	786	931	1,570	1,508	1,560
Net import reliance[3] as a percentage of estimated consumption	100	100	100	100	100

Recycling: None.

Import Sources (2010–13): Brazil, 57%; Canada, 42%; and other, 1%.

Tariff: Item	Number	Normal Trade Relations 12–31–14
Crocidolite	2524.10.0000	Free.
Amosite	2524.90.0010	Free.
Chrysotile:		
Crudes	2524.90.0030	Free.
Milled fibers, group 3 grades	2524.90.0040	Free.
Milled fibers, group 4 and 5 grades	2524.90.0045	Free.
Other	2524.90.0055	Free.
Other, asbestos	2524.90.0060	Free.

Depletion Allowance: 22% (Domestic), 10% (Foreign).

Government Stockpile: None.

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ASBESTOS

Events, Trends, and Issues: Domestic use of asbestos continued to decline from the record high of 803,000 tons in 1973. In 2014, estimated apparent consumption was 400 tons, a level not seen since the 1800s. The decline has occurred because asbestos substitutes, alternative materials, and new technology displaced asbestos from the traditional domestic asbestos markets. The chloralkali industry, currently the leading domestic consumer of asbestos, gained a greater share of the U.S. asbestos market as other uses declined. Use of asbestos by the chloralkali industry, however, may decline as the industry makes greater use of nonasbestos diaphragms and membrane cell technology, both of which do not use asbestos. Globally, asbestos-cement products are expected to be the leading asbestos-based market. World production is likely to remain at approximately 2.0 Mt for the near future because of continued demand for asbestos products in many regions of the world.

In 2014, U.S. imports decreased by 74% and estimated consumption of asbestos decreased by 48%. Consumption decreased because of reduced demand by the chloralkali and other miscellaneous industries in 2014. Imports decreased significantly in 2014 because domestic demand decreased and domestic companies supplemented imported asbestos with asbestos from industry stocks. In 2014, all asbestos imported and used in the United States was chrysotile, sourced from Australia (5%) and Brazil (95%). Imports from Australia were either from stocks or transshipments because Australia no longer mines asbestos. The average unit value of imports increased by 3% in 2014.

World Mine Production and Reserves:

	Mine production		Reserves[4]
	2013	2014[e]	
United States	—	—	Small
Brazil	307,000	291,000	11,000,000
China	420,000	400,000	Large
Kazakhstan	242,000	240,000	Large
Russia	1,050,000	1,050,000	Large
Other countries	340	300	Moderate
World total (rounded)	2,020,000	1,980,000	Large

World Resources: The world has 200 million tons of identified resources of asbestos. U.S. resources are large but are composed mostly of short-fiber asbestos, for which use in asbestos-based products is more limited than long-fiber asbestos.

Substitutes: Numerous materials substitute for asbestos. Substitutes include calcium silicate, carbon fiber, cellulose fiber, ceramic fiber, glass fiber, steel fiber, wollastonite, and several organic fibers, such as aramid, polyethylene, polypropylene, and polytetrafluoroethylene. Several nonfibrous minerals or rocks, such as perlite, serpentine, silica, and talc, are considered to be possible asbestos substitutes for products in which the reinforcement properties of fibers were not required. For the chloralkali industry, membrane cell technology is one alternative to asbestos diaphragms.

[e]Estimated. — Zero.
[1]Thought to include nonasbestos materials and reexports.
[2]Average Customs value for U.S. chrysotile imports, all grades combined. Prices for individual commercial products are not published.
[3]Defined as imports – exports.
[4]See Appendix C for resource/reserve definitions and information concerning data sources.

U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Commodity Summaries, January 2015