Combating occupational disease
Australian workers’ exposure to disease-causing hazards
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- Young workers are more likely to report exposure to hazards than older workers
- Small workplaces generally have poorer control provisions than larger workplaces
- Relatively small proportions of workers report training is provided about hazards and their health consequences
- Survey findings have led to:
  - consideration of regulation for vibration exposure
  - consideration of policy and regulatory options for dermal exposure to chemicals and wet work
  - development of new codes of practice for blood borne pathogens and guidance for biological hazards
81% of workers reported exposure to at least one hazard
32% of workers reported exposure to four or more hazards
61% of workers reported exposure to at least one physical hazard
74% of workers reported exposure to at least one chemical, biological or wet work hazard

Occupational disease data are not always useful for developing work health and safety policy. Collection of hazard exposure data enables policy makers to identify groups of workers with potentially risky or unexpected hazard exposures. Policy can be shaped to target the groups of workers most at risk of developing occupational diseases in the future. Data can be used to monitor exposure prevalence over time and may contribute to estimates of the work contribution to the overall burden of disease.

The National Hazard Exposure Worker Surveillance (NHEWS) survey was conducted in 2008. 4500 workers from around Australia were surveyed by telephone about their exposure to eight occupational hazards associated with occupational disease. Workers were also asked about the provision of controls for these hazards. Demographic and employment information were collected from each worker.

Detailed reports on the NHEWS study and each occupational hazard can be found on the Safe Work Australia website.

Key statistics

for priority industries*

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- 61% of workers reported exposure to at least one physical hazard
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Rationale

for national hazard exposure research

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* Manufacturing, Agriculture, forestry & fishing, Construction, Transport & storage, Health & community services

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