



Did you know? ... Occupational Cancers

Working in construction means that things you could come into contact with, or are exposed to, while you are working could cause you health problems. One of these health problems is occupational cancer. Occupational Cancer is where you have, over a period of time, come into contact, or been exposed, to substances, or a mixture of substances, called 'carcinogens'. A carcinogen is something that causes cancer and comes in many forms, eg solids, liquids or gasses, and can get into the body many different ways, by being breathed in, swallowed or absorbed through the skin. In construction carcinogens can include:

- Asbestos
- Silica
- Mineral Oils
- Diesel Engine Exhaust
- Sunlight – UV(A), UV(B) and UV(C)
- Hardwood dust
- Ultraviolet radiation from welding

What are the hazards and risks with Carcinogens?

When the carcinogens get into the body it can change the way cells grow, and can affect many different parts of the body. Cancerous cells keep reproducing until they form a primary tumour, or lump, and there are two types of tumours.

- **Benign tumours** are not cancerous and tend to remain local, that is it doesn't spread to other parts of the body. They usually grow quite slowly and will only become a problem if they:
 - Grow putting pressure on other parts of the body, eg body organs
 - Become painful, sore or unsightly

- Release hormones that change the way the body works
- Take up space inside the skull (such as a brain tumour)
- **Malignant tumours** are cancerous grow faster than benign tumours. They can spread to nearby tissue, and destroy it, as well as other parts of the body. It spreads to other parts of the body via the blood stream and the lymph system, causing secondary cancers.

Parts of the body that can be affected by cancer can include:

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|---------------------|-----------------|
| ● Bladder | ● Lung |
| ● Blood - Leukaemia | ● Nasal passage |
| ● Bone | ● Oesophagus |
| ● Brain | ● Pancreas |
| ● Kidney | ● Skin |
| ● Larynx | ● Stomach |
| ● Liver | ● Thyroid |

What should my employer be doing?

Your employer must make sure that your health is protected and prevent you being exposed to substances hazardous to your health. This should be done by other ways than personal protective equipment (PPE) or respiratory protective equipment (RPE) and by removing the use or production of the harmful substance. This could be done by:

- Changing the way a job is done so that there is no exposure
- Changing a process to remove, or reduce, the harmful waste, eg wood dust
- Substitute a non harmful substance and if this is not possible then
 - Use a less harmful substance
 - Use the substance in a different form

Once your employer has carried out a risk assessment then they must make sure that:

- Control measures are used, for example
 - Safe system of work are put in place and worked to



- Correct PPE or RPE is available
- Provide washing facilities with running hot/warm and cold running water so that you can wash before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Provide you with relevant information and training on substances that can harm you and the risks to your health
- If necessary, carry out health surveillance

What health checks do I have?

Carrying out health checks, or surveillance, is important in detecting early signs of any health problems. Signs of cancer could be picked up when you have you breathing or skin checked if results show that there is a problem. You will then be referred for further tests to try and help diagnosis.

What can I do to reduce the risk from cancer?

Look out for the following symbols



The international hazard symbol (COSHH) for - Longer term health hazards such as carcinogenicity and respiratory sensitisation.



The European hazard symbol (COSHH) for Harmful or irritant

If you see these symbols make sure you follow the control measures that your employer has put in place after doing a COSHH risk assessment to protect you. Also wear the right personal protective equipment (PPE) or respiratory protective equipment (RPE) and look after it to prevent damage

or contamination.

There are some simple steps to reduce the risk of dermatitis/sun burn:

- Avoid contact with materials that are known to cause cancers
- Protect yourself by before eating, drinking or smoking, by making sure you wash and dry your hands properly using the right soap/cleaner.
 - Use the pre and after work creams, including suntan lotion to protect yourself from the ultraviolet rays in sunlight
- Where possible keep yourself covered, wear a hat and sunglasses
- If possible try and work in the shade, especially between 11 am and 3 pm, when the ultraviolet rays are at their strongest.

If I spot any of these symptoms what do I need to do?

Normally it is a number years after coming into contact, or being exposed, to carcinogens before there are any symptoms and being able to identify any signs of cancer at an early stage is important, as there may be a higher chance of survival. But there are many different symptoms for cancer, depending on what cancer it is and where it is on the body. The cancer may cause pain or discomfort by pressing on a nerve or another organ close by.

Some symptoms of lung cancer

- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Losing weight
- Being short of breath
- Having a cough most of the time, or it changes after you've had for a while
- Coughing up phlegm which has some blood in it
- Being in pain, or aching, when breathing or coughing

Symptoms of nose or throat cancer

- Having a blocked or stuffy nose, especially if it's only one side that is blocked
- Having a runny nose which might have blood in it
- Nose bleeds
- Hearing loss, especially on one side
- Tinnitus



- Double vision or headaches
- Loss of sight, whether completely or a part
- Difficulty swallowing
- A growth or lump anywhere on the neck which doesn't go away

Symptoms of bladder cancer

- Blood in the urine – you may or may not see the blood, and there may not be any pain
- You may want to pass urine often or suddenly feel you need to pass urine
- Pain when passing urine

Symptoms of Non Melanoma Skin Cancers

- An area on the skin, a spot or a sore, that does not want to heal
- Area on the skin where it has broken down, or becomes an ulcer, that does not want to heal

An ulcer is an area on the skin that breaks down and gets deeper as time passes.

Symptoms of malignant melanoma skin cancer

- Check any moles you have regularly for any signs of change:
 - In shape, mainly if there the outline becomes irregular
 - In colour, it gets darker, becomes patchy or varies in colour
 - It gets bigger or a new mole grows quickly
 - The mole starts to itch or becomes painful
 - The mole bleeds, gets a crust and/or looks swollen or irritated



If you recognise any of these symptoms then you need to speak to someone. Speak to your the occupational health nurse or doctor, or your GP. For general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726

Useful Links

HSE website

Occupational cancer - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/cancer/>

Health and safety in the construction industry - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/index.htm>

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm>

Cancer Research - <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/about-cancer/causes-symptoms/causes/what-causes-cancer>

The Karen Clifford Skin Cancer Charity - www.skcin.org

CBH – www.cbhscheme.com