

Overview

Exposure to chemicals, dusts, and fumes in the workplace can cause asthma in adults.

Washington State's work-related asthma surveillance program identified 1,343 cases of occupational asthma during the time period 2001 to 2008. Workers' compensation records, physician reports, and injured worker interviews are analyzed here.

The purpose of this report is to identify the industries, occupations and asthma-causing agents associated with work-related asthma in Washington.

Asthma in the Workplace

Work-related Asthma in Washington State

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Key Findings

- Out of the 1343 cases identified by the asthma surveillance system, 1285 cases were workers' compensation claims, with a total medical cost of \$3 million dollars.
- The industry sectors having the greatest number of asthma cases were manufacturing (16%) and healthcare and social assistance (15%); followed by educational services (10%); and public administration (10%).
- The top three causes of occupational asthma were miscellaneous chemicals and materials, mineral and inorganic dusts, and plant material.
- Washington has an abundance of plant-related asthma cases compared to that reported by other US states conducting work related asthma surveillance. Western red cedar, wood dust, hop dust and hay were leading causes of plant-related exposure and these exposures reflect the industries that are common in Washington such as sawmills, secondary wood processing, and agriculture.

Impact

State-based asthma surveillance provides regional identification of asthma-causing agents that can be used to direct local prevention activities.

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Research for Safe Work

The SHARP Program at the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries partners with business and labor to develop sensible, effective solutions to identify and eliminate industry-wide hazards. Learn more at www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research