

ASTHMA & WESTERN RED CEDAR



Common Asthma Symptoms:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Chest Tightness
- Shortness of Breath

What are the costs?

- Workers' compensation claim costs for asthma caused by Western Red Cedar have been as high as \$63,750 per claim.
- Lost workdays: One claimant was off work for more than 1300 days.
- Loss of valuable, well-trained employees.

Department of
**LABOR AND
INDUSTRIES**



True Stories: How Western Red Cedar Affected the Lives of these Workers

Carpenter Must Find New Line of Work Due to Western Red Cedar

A residential builder in his forties had been experiencing episodes of coughing, wheezing and chest tightness at work. He realized that these episodes occurred when he was working around Western Red Cedar dust. His doctor told him that he had asthma caused by cedar dust exposure. He was off work for many months before he was well enough to find a new job.

After 6 Years, Worker Must Leave Sawmill Due to Asthma Caused by Western Red Cedar

A man in his late thirties had been working at a sawmill for six years. Shortly after the mill began to process Western Red Cedar, he started to develop sinus congestion, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. His doctor stated that he had asthma from cedar dust and that the only way he would get better is if he avoids working with Western Red Cedar.

What is work-related asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. Work-related asthma is a form of asthma caused by exposures in the workplace.

There are two types of work-related asthma. The first is

when a worker who has never had breathing problems develops asthma from exposures at work. The other is when a worker already has asthma, but it is made worse by work exposures.

How does Western Red Cedar cause asthma?

Western Red Cedar contains a chemical called *plicatic acid* that causes an allergic reaction (called sensitization) in some people.

There is no way to predict who will become sensitized to *plicatic acid* so it is important to limit the exposures of all workers.



Prevention Strategies:

Asthma from Western Red Cedar can be prevented. The best defense against work-related asthma is a good offense. Prevent asthma by keeping your work environment clean and free of cedar dust as much as possible. This can be done in a number of ways as shown in the **Control Methods** below. Please note the most effective controls (the offense) are listed at the top.

Control Methods

- 1. Engineering solutions:** Change the way things are done to lessen the worker's exposure to dust.
 - Enclose and ventilate machines to keep the work area clean and free of dust.
 - Install local exhaust ventilation to remove dust before it enters the work environment.
- 2. Administrative controls:**
 - Train workers on the importance of minimizing cedar dust.
 - Provide wash facilities and changing areas to decrease take home exposure to cedar dust.
- 3. Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as respirators:** Use this as a last resort. Be sure the worker is properly trained and fitted to use PPE.

If you think a worker may have asthma symptoms or someone tells you they are having trouble breathing, have them see a doctor now. Asthma is a serious disease and could severely affect a person's health or even cause death. Early diagnosis can lead to a better health outcome.

Who can help?

Both the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) and the University of Washington have resources available to help you design a safe and healthy workplace.

Labor and Industries

WISHA has consultation services available at your request. For more information or to contact a consultant in your area:

<http://www.LNI.wa.gov/Safety/KeepSafe/Assistance/Consultation/about.asp>

SHARP performs research regarding occupational illness and disease. SHARP can also provide suggestions to make your workplace safer.

1-888-66-SHARP

SHARP.LNI.wa.gov

University of Washington

The Field Group (UW Field Research and Consultation Group) provides information, on-site evaluation of health and safety issues in the workplace, and consultation on strategies to reduce occupational hazards.

(206) 543-9711

<http://depts.washington.edu/frcg/>

This brochure was supported in part by Cooperative Agreement 5 U01 OH07292 from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of NIOSH or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

