

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. The risk of occupational cancer increases if you have, over a period of time, come into contact, or been exposed, to substances, or a mixture of substances, called 'carcinogens' during the course of your work. 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 carcinogens get into the body they 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. ***There are two types of tumours:***

- ***Benign tumours*** are not cancerous and tend not to 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 and grow faster than benign tumours. They can spread to nearby tissue, and destroy it. They spread 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 include:

- Bladder
- Blood (leukaemia)
- Bones
- Brain
- Kidney
- Larynx
- Liver
- Lungs
- Nasal passage
- Oesophagus
- Pancreas
- Skin
- Stomach
- 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. As well as providing personal protective equipment (PPE) or respiratory protective equipment (RPE) they should remove 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*
- *Substituting a non-harmful substance and if this is not possible then*
- *Using a less harmful substance*
- *Using 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 systems of work are put in place and worked to*
- *Correct PPE or RPE is available*
- *Washing facilities are provided, with running hot/warm and cold water so that you can wash before eating or drinking*
- *They provide you with relevant information and training on substances that can harm you and the risks to your health*
- *If necessary, they carry out health surveillance*

What health checks should 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 your breathing or skin is 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 of cancer?

Look out for the following symbols



The international hazard symbol (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health for longer term health hazards caused by any substance that is directly involved in causing cancer.



The European hazard symbol (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) for Harmful or irritant chemicals.

If you see these symbols, it's important to make sure you follow the control measures that your employer has put in place after doing a 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 you can take to reduce the risk of cancer:

- *Avoid contact with materials that are known to cause cancers*
- *Protect yourself by making sure you wash and dry your hands properly using the right soap/cleaner before eating, drinking or smoking*
- *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 11am and 3pm, when the ultraviolet rays are at their strongest.*

What are the symptoms and what do I need to do?

It can take a number of years after coming into contact, or being exposed, to carcinogens before there are any symptoms. However, being able to identify any signs of cancer at an early stage is important, as it might mean there is a higher chance of survival. There are many different symptoms for cancer, depending on what type of cancer it is and where it is in the body. The cancer may cause pain or discomfort by pressing on a nerve or other organs.

Symptoms of lung cancer include:

- *Loss of appetite*
- *Tiredness (fatigue)*
- *Losing weight*
- *Being short of breath*
- *Having a cough most of the time*
- *Coughing up phlegm which has some blood in it*
- *Being in pain, or aching, when breathing or coughing*

Symptoms of nose or throat cancer include:

- *Having a blocked or stuffy nose, especially if it's only one side that is blocked*
- *Having a runny nose, with blood in the mucus*
- *Nose bleeds*
- *Hearing loss, especially on one side*
- *Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)*
- *Double vision or headaches*
- *Loss of sight, whether complete or partial*
- *Difficulty swallowing*
- *A growth or lump anywhere on the neck which doesn't go away*

Symptoms of bladder cancer include:

- *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 include:

- *An area on the skin, a spot or a sore, that does not heal*
- *An area on the skin where it has broken down, or becomes an ulcer, that does not 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 the outline becomes irregular*
 - *In colour, if it gets darker, becomes patchy or varies in colour*
 - *If it gets bigger or a new mole grows quickly*
 - *If the mole starts to itch or becomes painful*
 - *If the mole bleeds, gets a crust and/or looks swollen or irritated*

If you recognise any of these symptoms then it's important to speak to your the occupational health practitioner or your GP as soon as possible.

For general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726

Useful links

HSE website at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/cancer/>

Health and safety in the construction industry at:

www.hse.gov.uk/construction/index.htm

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) at: www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm

Cancer Research UK at: www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/about-cancer/causes-symptoms/causes/what-causes-cancer

CBH website at: www.cbhscheme.com

Fit for Work website at: fitforwork.org