

Workers can register their workplace exposures online

Since late last year, workers, employers, and others have been able to register and permanently record on-the-job worker exposures to harmful substances through WorkSafeBC's new online exposure registry program. Harmful substances eligible for the program include asbestos, formaldehyde, hepatitis, HIV, isocyanates, lead, meningitis, mercury, mold, noise, scabies, shingles, silica, thallium, tuberculosis, and wood dust, each of which poses potentially serious health concerns. Since some occupational diseases only develop after a prolonged exposure or long latency period, the historical information in the registry—available at WorkSafeBC.com—could provide valuable information for future diagnosis, work-related causation, and WorkSafeBC claim adjudication.

Worker, employer, and workers' compensation researchers all supported the development of WorkSafeBC's exposure registry program. Ontario is the only other province to have an exposure-incidence reporting system, but all other provinces are looking to establish similar programs.

The registry will assist WorkSafeBC's prevention efforts by providing data that can be used to track industry trends and raise awareness about the link between harmful exposures and occupational disease. These data include:

- When and where the exposure occurred.
- What led to the exposure, such as a cough or sneeze, cut or scrape, explosion, inhalation, leak, spill, or splash, and whether there was a single exposure or multiple exposures.

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- The number of workers exposed.
- Whether personal protective equipment was required, supplied, and used.

WorkSafeBC does not follow up with workers or employers on every notification, but focuses on exposures with significantly increasing numbers; multiple occurrences by company, location, and industry; multiple

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workers; or emerging issues. The information may also help employers identify potentially dangerous work-sites, and enable WorkSafeBC to initiate an early, proactive response to a potential problem.

If your patient has been exposed to a potentially harmful substance at work, but does not have an occupational disease or disability related to that program, advise your patient to submit that information to WorkSafeBC's exposure registry program.

However, if the exposure results in an occupational disease or work disability, you should follow the usual procedure of submitting a completed Form 8 to WorkSafeBC.

Workers and others can submit information to the registry by visiting WorkSafeBC.com, clicking on Forms, and then clicking on either the Workers' or Employers' tab to find Form 41M1 (exposure registry program). Information entered in the exposure registry is kept private in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

For more information on occupational disease

If you would like assistance in determining whether a patient's disease or disability is the result of a harmful, work-related exposure, please contact one of WorkSafeBC's occupational disease specialists or a medical advisor in your local WorkSafeBC office. If the disease or disability is determined to be occupational, the patient is entitled to compensation.

WorkSafeBC's Occupational Disease Services department, located in Richmond, administers all occupational disease claims from workers throughout the province. For general questions relating to occupational disease claims, contact a team assistant in the department at 604 279-8158. To reach the manager of Occupational Disease Services, call 604 276-3317. To register an occupational disease claim, including asbestos-related claims, call Teleclaim at 1 888 WORKERS (1 888 967-5377), Monday to Friday, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

—Peter Rothfels, MD
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