MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Of the many problems that can result from occupational lung hazards, many are pervasive and serious. ***Examples:***

Asthma may cause a tightness in the chest, wheezing, coughing and difficulty breathing. ***Indicators:*** Happens in "episodes," a series of events that result in swelling of the lung lining, tightening of the muscle, increased secretion of mucus in the airway and narrowed airways. Asthma accounts for 3 million lost workdays annually.

Chronic bronchitis is an inflammation of the lining of the bronchial tubes. ***Indicators:*** Chronic cough, increased mucus, frequent clearing of the throat and shortness of breath. Workers in certain jobs with a high concentration of dust and irritating fumes are at high risk.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), also called chronic obstructive lung disease, refers to chronic bronchitis and emphysema that frequently coexist. COPD gets worse over time and is the fourth leading cause of death. ***Indicators:*** At first, only a mild shortness of breath and occasional coughing. Later, a chronic cough with clear, colorless sputum.

Byssinosis (brown lung disease) and pneumoconiosis (black lung disease) cause workers to suffer damage to their lungs. Byssinosis is a chronic condition that is caused by dusts from hemp, flax and cotton processing. It obstructs the small airways. Pneumoconiosis is caused by inhaling dusts, such as coal dust, and particles from asbestos.

THE SMOKING CONNECTION

Smoking increases the severity of lung and respiratory diseases. Smokers who are exposed to carcinogens such as asbestos and radiation greatly increase their chances of getting lung cancer.

SAVE YOUR BREATH
Wear Your Respirator or Facemask

Occupational lung cancer is attributed to inhalation of carcinogens such as asbestos, oil and petroleum-related carbon compounds. Prevention: a respirator, varieties of which are used by about 3.3 million workers today. **There are two types of respirators:**

Air-purifying respirators (APRs)

remove harmful contaminants from the air. They range from simple disposable masks to sophisticated positive-pressure respirators. Some APRs remove particles of dust, fibers, fumes or mist through a filter, while other APRs remove vapors and gases by absorbing them and letting clean air enter the facepiece. Others are a combination of both.

Warning: APRs are not to be used in an oxygen-deficient environment.

Air-supplying respirators (ASPs)

provide you with air from outside the work area or from a compressed air cylinder. ASPs may include self-contained breathing apparatus or complete air-supplied suits.

Important: Respirator facepieces are made in a variety of sizes to fit a wide range of face shapes. However, beards, whiskers, sideburns, large mustaches and weight gains or losses interfere with the proper fit of a respirator facepiece seal.

PC 52117

Lung Protection

LUNG DISEASE: It's Not Just From Smoking

Most lung disease is chronic, affecting some 25 million people and causing more than 360,000 deaths every year in the United States alone. Although you may think that most lung disease is due to smoking, occupational lung disease is the No. 1 work-related illness in the United States. Diseases included in this category are caused by extended exposure to irritating substances, such as solvent vapors, dust and toxic substances, which causes acute or chronic respiratory illness.

When to See a Doctor

Of the many problems that can result from occupational lung hazards, many are pervasive and serious. If you experience the following symptoms, consult your physician:

- Tightness in the chest
- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Frequent or chronic coughing
- Wheezing
- Increased mucus
- Frequent clearing of the throat

These symptoms could signal asthma, chronic bronchitis or chronic obstructive pulmonary illness.

Something's in the Air

Poor air quality contributes to respiratory disease and other health problems. So be aware of what's in the air ...

At Work

You can prevent occupational lung disease through simple safety precautions.

Start with your senses.

Your eyes. Be aware of unusual eye irritation, especially when you first enter your work area. Fumes or chemicals could be in the air.

Your nose. A strange odor may be the first sign of dangerous fumes. Keep in mind that some lung irritants, such as carbon monoxide, are odorless.

Your sixth sense. Persistent symptoms of illness, such as a constant cough and shortness of breath during work hours, may indicate that something is adversely affecting your lungs.

Safe Steps to Take

- Clean up spills promptly.
- Keep your work area organized and neat.
- Store chemicals in their original containers with lids and hazard warnings in place.
- Always follow safety procedures, such as working with hazardous substances in a well-ventilated area and disposing of chemicals, asbestos and other lung irritants properly.
- Alert a supervisor if you notice anything unusual, such as strange odors, fumes or respiratory symptoms.

At Home

Moisture leads to the growth of mold, mildew and fungus, which can trigger asthma and allergies. Make sure the kitchen, bathrooms and basement are cleaned often and have good ventilation or air circulation.

Household products such as cleaning products, pesticides, paints, hobby products and solvents may be sources of potentially harmful chemicals. They can cause dizziness; nausea; allergic reactions; eye, skin and respiratory tract irritation; and even cancer. Use these products in well-ventilated areas. ***Caution:*** Read instruction labels carefully before mixing any chemical solutions. When combined, even common household liquids such as ammonia and bleach may release vapors that are toxic to your lungs.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas that enters a home through cracks in the foundation floor, walls and other openings. Too much cumulative indoor radon exposure can lead to lung cancer. A simple at-home test can help determine whether you need to take action to lower radon levels; look in the Yellow Pages under Radon Testing.

Secondhand smoke from tobacco causes thousands of lung cancer deaths each year in nonsmokers, and tens of thousands of respiratory infections in children. Avoid smoke-filled rooms at parties, and ask people not to smoke in your vehicle and inside your home.

What About Asbestos?

Asbestos consists of microscopic mineral fibers that, when inhaled, can cause asbestosis (scarring of the lung tissue) and lung cancer.

Where can you find asbestos?

- Roofing and flooring materials
- Wall and pipe insulation
- Spackling compounds
- Cement
- Heating equipment
- Acoustic insulation

A simple disposable mask may be your first line of defense. Respirators and special clothing may occasionally be required.

If you have asbestos in your home, such as in furnace ductwork, flooring or siding, leave it alone. Asbestos itself is usually not a serious problem, but disturbing it may create a health hazard where none existed before. If the asbestos material is deteriorating or is damaged, however, consult a professional trained to handle asbestos.

Every Breath You Take

Your lungs are vital internal organs that process the air you breathe. Every breath you take draws in a variety of substances, from dust and pollen to tobacco smoke and toxic chemicals. Your lungs are constantly working, and it's up to you to keep them working properly.