

CARCINOGENS IN THE WORKPLACE?

RR-796



THINK
ABOUT IT!

The risk of developing work-related cancer is far less obvious than the risk of falling or being injured on the job. Yet, according to the CSST [workers' compensation board], there were 68 deaths in Quebec as a result of workplace accidents in 2011, as opposed to 100 caused by occupational cancer.

This leaflet concerns all types of workplaces, because asbestos isn't the only carcinogen!

Causes of cancer

A number of causes may add up and increase the risk of getting cancer or developing it at a younger age.



Carcinogens

We can be exposed to carcinogens in dust, liquid, gas, waves or other forms. They can be colourless, odourless and invisible. See the table below for examples.

ROUTES INTO THE BODY	EXAMPLES	MEANS OF PREVENTION
Inhalation	Wood dust	Local exhaust ventilation • Respiratory protection
	Silica dust in drywall compound	Local exhaust ventilation • Working methods • Respiratory protection
	Asbestos fibres in materials handled	Working methods • Protective clothing • Respiratory protection • Personal hygiene
	Fumes from stripping furniture	Substitution • Local exhaust ventilation • Working methods • Respiratory protection • Appropriate gloves
	Diesel engine exhaust	Mechanical maintenance • Local exhaust ventilation • General ventilation
Absorption through skin	Dust and fumes when plating metal	Local exhaust ventilation • Working methods • Respiratory protection • Appropriate gloves
	Solvents used for cleaning	Substitution • Working methods • Appropriate gloves
Skin contact	Hepatitis B or C virus when handling contaminated material	Vaccination • Working methods • Appropriate gloves
	Hand contact with tar or soot	Working methods • Appropriate gloves • Personal hygiene
Direct exposure	Solar radiation outdoors	Light-coloured, long-sleeved clothing • Hat • Work schedule
	X-Rays for medical, paramedical and industrial applications	Working methods • Physical barriers
Ingestion	Handling food or cigarette with dirty hands	Working methods • Personal hygiene

Even very low exposure can increase the risk of cancer. We spend an average of 40 hours a week at work for 30 or 40 years. **We should reduce our exposure as much as possible.**

The most **common** types of occupational cancer are **lung bladder** and **skin** cancer.

To view a list of carcinogens, go to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) Web site:

<http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Classification/index.php>

To know which carcinogens are covered by the [Regulation respecting occupational health and safety](#), see its Schedule I.

How to identify carcinogens

✓ Product labels

WHMIS pictograms on labels are the first indication of a hazard.



Toxic



Toxic, carcinogenic

✓ Safety data sheets (material safety data sheets)

The safety data sheet for each chemical product provides information on its health effects and how to protect yourself. The SDS must be available in the workplace and can also be found on the manufacturer's website.

✓ Signage

Signs are a way of warning workers about working conditions or areas that could be hazardous to their health and about mandatory protective measures.



It is important to think about your work environment and the products, materials and processes used.

Caution!

If you **transfer** a product to a new container, be sure to **label** it clearly.

True or false?

"If products are sold, they must be safe."

False!

Preventive measures

Under the [Regulation respecting occupational health and safety](#), worker exposure to substances having a known or suspected carcinogenic effect on humans must be reduced to a minimum.

In addition to taking preventive measures, employers must train and inform workers about

- the health effects of exposure to carcinogens and
- how to reduce or eliminate exposure.

BEST PRACTICES

Remain vigilant at work Read product labels and pictograms; report any accidental spill.

Make proper use of the personal protective equipment your employer must provide Wear appropriate work clothing and gloves, conduct respiratory protective equipment seal and fit testing and replace cartridges as recommended.

Develop safe habits Don't eat or drink at your workstations; wash your hands and face, especially before eating.

Leave work hazards... at work Don't take work overalls home; wash hands before leaving work.



It is important to remain **vigilant**. New products or new processes can present **new risks**.

To conclude

The prevention officer or health and safety committee in your workplace can answer any questions you may have. You can also talk to your supervisor or trade union or get in touch with the:

Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CSST)

www.csst.qc.ca/nous_joindre/Pages/repertoire_general.aspx Toll-free: 1-866-302-CSST (2778)

CSST's toxicological index

www.reptox.csst.qc.ca

Public occupational health team

www.santeautravail.qc.ca

To print this document or for further reading: F. Labrèche et al., Are there carcinogens in your workplace? It's time to act!, RG-796, 14 p.

www.irsst.qc.ca/en/-irsst-publication-are-there-carcinogens-in-your-workplace-rg-796.html

Ce feuillet est également disponible en français : www.irsst.qc.ca/-publication-irsst-y-a-t-il-des-cancerogenes-dans-votre-milieu-de-travail-rg-790.html

Produced by: Communications and Knowledge Transfer Division, Institut de Recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST) www.irsst.qc.ca - November 2013