



Millions of people are living with or will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lifetime.

Research shows that 1 out of every 3 people in the United States will be diagnosed with cancer. Some environmental risk factors that may cause cancer include pollution, tobacco, smoke, radiation, and exposure to chemicals. Several actions should be taken to raise awareness of the need for protection against work-related cancers.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health classifies chemicals as occupational carcinogens and maintains a list of substances considered potential occupational carcinogens.

NIOSH sets “Risk Management Limits” for workers exposed to carcinogens, they refer to it as “RML-CA,” which is the daily maximum 8-hour; time-weighted-average concentration of a carcinogen above which a worker should not be exposed, which was established to be a reasonable starting point for controlling workplace hazards.

NIOSH has established that exposure to carcinogens should be reduced through the elimination of a hazard, followed by substitution, and engineering controls. When engineering controls are inadequate, implementation of administrative controls or the use of PPE is recommended.

NIOSH relies on existing cancer hazard assessments completed by the U.S. National Toxicology Program, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer to make chemical carcinogen classifications.

Engineering controls such as local exhaust ventilation can be highly effective in protecting workers. NIOSH Engineering Controls Database provides information on other effective engineering controls that can help employers reduce the risk of workplace illness and injuries and protect workers by eliminating or reducing hazardous conditions.

Employers must ensure the correct personal protective equipment is worn by workers when handling carcinogens. This includes protective clothing, a long-sleeved shirt or jacket, an impermeable apron, closed-toed shoes, gloves of an appropriate material, safety goggles, a respirator, face shield, and hearing and head protection.

Everyone working with carcinogenic substances must take the necessary health and safety precautions to avoid illness, injuries, loss of production, and unnecessary costs to the company.

Discussion Points:

- What cancer-causing substances are in your work environment?
- What are “Risk Management Limits”?
- How to reduce exposure to carcinogens, according to NIOSH?
- What PPE should be worn by workers when handling carcinogens?
- NIOSH Engineering Controls Database provides information on engineering controls.