

Occupational Disease Action Plan: Allergen and Irritants Update

Working Group: Linn Holness (Chair), Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease with representatives from Occupational Cancer Research Centre, Ministry of Labour, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, The Lung Association, Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, Public Services Health and Safety Association, Workplace Safety North, Workplace Safety and Prevention Services.

Occupational Disease – the Issue:

In 2016 the Ministry of Labour (MoL) in Ontario recognized occupational disease (OD) as a priority for prevention. This decision resulted from years of research and knowledge generation along with the lobbying efforts of workers' groups and occupational physicians and nurses in the province.

Of specific concern was the lack of recognition and reporting of work related disease and the subsequent lack of information about prevention to avoid sometimes costly and personally catastrophic outcomes for work status and personal health.

As WSIB claims for work related disease began to climb and our understanding of known risks improved, the opportunity for prevention activity emerged. The MoL accepted the challenge!

OD Action Plan – the Opportunity:

In 2016 the MoL worked with a range of health and safety system experts to identify priorities for action over a 3 year time frame. The group identified 3 priority exposures after considering most common diseases and most significant impact on human health and work status.

The final prioritized list –

- Noise (hearing loss)
- Diesel exhaust (cancer)
- Allergens and irritants (lung and skin)

Strengthening data intelligence to support decision making and making progress on improving work history taking within the electronic medical record were also identified for action.

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Allergen & Irritants (A&I) Working Group:

In 2017 an Ontario health and safety system working group (see representation above) including The Lung Association was established to develop and action a plan to collectively address allergens and irritants of concern for lung and skin health.

In order to focus the effort, CREOD staff prepared background briefing notes on 10 known allergens and irritants considering a review of current literature, provincial patch test data from the St. Michael's Hospital occupational disease specialty clinic, expert input via survey from international medical experts for both skin and lung, and available WSIB data provided by the data intelligence working group.

After review of the background material the group prioritize the exposures considering prevalence, significance/impact and known opportunities to leverage activities underway in the province.

Prioritization Results:

The following prioritization was landed for collective prevention planning an action.

| | Irritants | Allergens |
|------|-----------------|---------------|
| Lung | Cleaning agents | Isocyanates |
| Skin | Wet work | Preservatives |

Next Steps:

The working group has since compiled and catalogued known resources for prevention and is working to clarify the target audience(s) for prevention considering H&SS consultants, JHSC members, workers and their supervisors, and front line health care providers. This is a critical step!

Generic fact sheets for recognizing disease, hazards and prevention have been developed for skin health. A customized generic set for cleaners has been developed and HSAs are considering customization. A similar range of activity is being planned with the Lung Association.

