

Alarming Figures on Cancer Due to Occupation in Australia Could See Workers Comp Payouts Soar



According to the Cancer Council, occupational exposures to carcinogens are estimated to cause over 5000 new cases of cancer in Australia each year.

Occupational cancers are those that occur as a result of exposure to cancer causing agents in the workplace such as industrial chemicals, metals, combustion products and forms on radiation including ultraviolet or ionising radiation.

A study by Fritschi and Driscoll (2006) estimated the number of cancer cases caused each year by occupational exposures. Their study reveals that for both men and women, **melanoma has 208 cases caused by occupational exposure per year in Australia.**



The study also estimated around 34,000 non-melanoma skin cancers are due to occupational exposure (28,000 in men and 6,000 in women).

Skin cancers, combining both melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers, remain the highest contributor to reported claims data, accounting for 53% of the number of claims made during this period.

Mesotheliomas were the second highest contributor, accounting for a further 26.1% of cancer claims.

However, The Cancer Council also conveys that between 2000-2012 the number of occupationally caused cancers with successfully compensated claims through Safe Work Australia each year equates to less than 8% of the expected number.

For example, the study conducted in 2006 reveals out of 34,000 non-melanoma and 208 melanoma cases caused due to occupational exposures, only 155 non-melanoma and 25 melanoma cases were claimed during 2000-01.

The many possible reasons for this level of under compensation include the lack of awareness of occupational risk factors for cancer among workers and health professionals, inadequate recordings of worker's occupational history, which could help to identify possible exposure to carcinogens and reduced awareness of other non-occupational risk factors for specific cancers.

With awareness of occupational risk factors for cancer likely to increase, it is crucial for workplaces to firmly implement both existing and non-existing health policies and practices to encourage protection and safety methods that is specific to their industry.

Outdoor workers are at a considerably higher risk of cancer exposure, due to higher levels of sun exposure (ultraviolet radiation) and poor uptake of protective measures inside and outside work hours.

According to the Journal of Occupational Health (2014) the uptake of protection by outdoor workers, including sun protection behaviours, is affected by a complex relationship between both workplace and personal factors.

Therefore, workplaces need to focus on implementing strategies and health policies that target both the workplace environment and the worker's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to decrease harmful cancer exposure further in an occupational setting.

Written by Spotscreen 29th May, 2015

References

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Please feel free to contact Spotscreen on **1300 305 230** or at enquiries@spotscreen.net.au for more information