

THE FACTS HARDWOOD DUST



About 3 million workers in the EU are estimated to be potentially exposed to hardwood dust. Prolonged exposure to hardwood dust can cause cancer in the nose and paranasal sinuses. Hardwood dust is classified as Group 1 carcinogen by the IARC, meaning they are seen as a definite cause of cancer in humans.

Where risks occur

Occupations with high exposure to wood dust include sander operators, press operators in the wood products industry, lathe operators, construction workers and carpenters. Industries where exposure occurs are the furniture industry, construction, forestry and carpentry industries.

More about the substance

Hardwood dust is created when machines or tools are used to cut or shape hardwood. High amounts of wood dust are for instance produced in sawmills. The biggest risk is from fine dust, as you can breathe this deep into your nose and lungs where it will do the most damage. Fine dust will also spread further from the cutting process. The quantity and type of wood dust will depend on the wood being cut and the machine that is used.

How symptoms can affect you

When workers inhale the dust, it is deposited in the nose, throat and other airways. Exposure to wooddust can cause respiratory diseases, eye irritation, skin diseases and in case of prolonged exposure cancer.

Latency period between exposure and wooddust related nose-cancer is estimated to be at least 20 years.

What you can do

Perform proper exposure measurements so it is known when actions should be taken. Investigate if workers report respiratory symptoms. Best solution is to control exposure through design and engineering modifications, such as installing an exhaust ventilation system with collectors placed at points where dust is produced. Exposure can also be reduced by consciously selecting the types of wood, equipment and working techniques. Personal protective equipment, such as respirators, is a short-term solution for reducing exposure and should only be used as last resort.

References: ETUC, HSE, IARC