



NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Position/Policy Statement

Occupational Illness

The National Safety Council recognizes that occupational illness is a serious workplace issue affecting thousands of workers. In addition to the human suffering, there is also a significant economic burden estimated to be over \$50 billion or more annually. While illnesses are subject to reporting challenges due to latency periods associated with the onset of illness, estimates indicate that deaths due to occupational illness are ten times that of injuries, with thousands more suffering from debilitated illness.

The National Safety Council recommends that employers, labor, government and researchers take the following steps to enhance our understanding of the risk, what can be done to reduce the risk and how to help stakeholders to continue to improve our knowledge and performance in the prevention of occupational illnesses:

- Consider the latest available scientific research, consensus standards, employer best practices, and other reliable sources of information – including ACGIH and NIOSH – for determining the most effective control strategies, which should go beyond OSHA's Permissible Exposure Limits (PELs), Hazard Communication Standard (HazCom) and GHS.
- Determine how to improve reporting and tracking of occupational illnesses to support better understanding, prioritization, progress measurement and research.
- Share information and practices on prevention of occupational illness including how to engage workers, gain their meaningful participation, and provide them with necessary knowledge, skills and equipment to safely work with chemicals.
- Continue a process of improvement for managing exposure to chemicals that reduces risks to acceptable levels according to the hierarchy of control.
- Contribute to a process of review and update for existing standards necessary to protect workers from harmful exposure to chemicals as well as other new standards that may be necessary.
- Consider total worker health and contributing factors to workers health and well-being that may exacerbate occupational illness exposures.

This position statement reflects the opinions of the National Safety Council but not necessarily those of each member organization.

Adopted by the Council, March, 2015