

# Occupational Asthma Policy

## Purpose

To enable Compass Group UK & Ireland to identify and manage the risks associated with occupational asthma.

## Introduction

Health & Safety regulations require employers to assess whether their employees are at a significant risk of suffering from work related illnesses such as Occupational Asthma. If there is a significant risk, employers must take action to address the situation and make effective arrangements for its prevention in the future.

## Guidance

### Who is most at risk?

Occupational asthma is a significant cause of ill health in many industries. Those most at risk are people exposed to substances that are particularly known to cause asthma if breathed in. These substances include:

- Flour dust and grain
- Wood dusts
- Soldering flux
- Latex
- Some glues and resins

### What are the symptoms of Occupational Asthma?

Occupational asthma affects the breathing and is caused by the narrowing or tightening of the airways in the lungs. The following symptoms may indicate that a person has occupational asthma:

- Wheezing
- Tightening of the chest
- Breathlessness
- Coughing

Symptoms are often most severe in the evening or at night, therefore people may not associate them with work. However, improvement in symptoms during weekends and holidays often point to an occupational cause.

## Procedure

### Find out if there is a problem:

- Which of your team come into regular contact with the above substances known to cause occupational asthma?
- Check their sickness absence due to breathing problems – if there is one case of asthma there could be more.
- Investigate complaints from your team regarding breathing problems.

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**If you find no evidence of a problem:**

- Be vigilant. Warn your team of the risk and ask them to report any possible problems.
- Make sure employees wear appropriate PPE (e.g. facemask) when required to. For example, when using power tools that create dust or if working in an area for prolonged periods where flour dust may be breathed in.

**If you find you have a problem:**

Find out the possible causes. Can the causes of the problem be removed?

- Read product labels and look at the safety data sheets or COSHH Product Assessments for substances to see if the words “Irritating to respiratory system” or “May cause sensitisation by inhalation” are included in any ‘risk phrases’.
- If so, talk to your product supplier to see if there is a safer, less harmful alternative.
- Make sure PPE is cleaned after each use and stored so that it does not become contaminated.

**Then:**

- Ensure all applicable safe systems of work and control measures identified in the relevant risk assessment for the tasks or work activities are being implemented to prevent other employees getting occupational asthma.
- Monitor the situation to ensure the control measures are effective.
- If possible, change their job for one that eliminates contact with the agent causing the problem.
- Instruct employees how to minimise the risks, recognise early symptoms, and report these as soon as possible will help to prevent occupational asthma.

**You must also:**

- Advise the employee to contact their doctor so that he/she can confirm that this is in fact Occupational Asthma.
- If confirmation of Occupational Asthma is received from the employee’s doctor or Company Nominated Doctor, Occupational Health Practitioner or other suitably qualified person, this must be reported to the Enforcing Authority.
- Contact your HSE Manager, Line Manager and HR Manager to inform them.
- The HSE Manager is responsible for making a report of a disease under the RIDDOR Regulations.

**Click here to download a Health & Safety Executive guidance document:**

[Breathe Freely: A Workers Information Card on Occupational Asthma](#)

You may wish to visit the following website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/asthma/index.htm>

See also [COSHH](#) in other parts of this website.