

## **Diesel fumes at work cause 130 lung cancer cases every year**

### ***Cancer Council Australia highlights cancer risks during National Safe Work Month***

Cancer Council is calling for greater cancer awareness in the workplace, following new estimates that about 130 workers are diagnosed each year in Australia with lung cancer as a result of work-based exposure to diesel fumes.

Terry Slevin, Chair of Cancer Council Australia's Occupational and Environmental Cancer Committee, said an estimated 3.6 million Australians were exposed to cancer-causing agents at work, with around 5,000 cancer cases diagnosed each year as a result.

"Awareness of the risks of exposures like asbestos and UV radiation is increasing, and is reflected in gradual improvements in work safety practices," Mr Slevin said. "By contrast, awareness of the hazards of exposure to diesel fumes is low, especially in relation to the potential harms.

"Exposure to diesel fumes is Australia's second-most prevalent work-based cancer-causing agent. It's estimated that around 1.2 million Australians are exposed to diesel engine exhaust at work each year and that 130 workers each year are diagnosed with lung cancer as a result of their exposure on the job.

"The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer has upgraded its classification of diesel exhaust to a 'Group 1' carcinogen, confirming that it is an established cause of cancer in humans. IARC estimates that people regularly exposed to diesel exhaust fumes at work can be up to 40 per cent more likely to develop lung cancer.

"While the general population might only be exposed to diesel occasionally, those who work with diesel-fuelled heavy machinery are at high risk. This includes those who work with diesel motor vehicles including buses, tractors, trains and forklifts, especially in enclosed spaces like garages and workshops. There are also risks for people who work with diesel operated generators, compressors or power plants.

Mr Slevin said both workers and employers had to take steps to reduce their cancer risk at work. "Taking simple steps, such as winding up the window and turning on the air con if you are driving a diesel vehicle, can reduce your cancer risk," Mr Slevin said.

As a part of National Safe Work Month this October, Cancer Council Australia is today (4/10) releasing a series of free resources outlining workplace cancer risks for employers and employees. As well as diesel engine exhaust, the new fact sheets cover UV radiation (outdoor workers), asbestos (builders and renovators), welding fumes and second-hand tobacco smoke.

The resources aim to provide information about workplace cancer risks, how to reduce carcinogen exposure at work, and legal obligations for organisations.

Mr Slevin said exposing employees to avoidable cancer risks was unethical and illegal – and preventable.

"Taking stronger action now, and increasing awareness, will go a long way to avoiding the worst kind of problems down the track – employees being diagnosed with a cancer that can be attributed to what happened to them at work."

For more information please visit: [cancer.org.au/workcancer](http://cancer.org.au/workcancer)

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