

Safety & Health Training: Signs and Symptoms of Workplace-Related Illness

Occupational illnesses can be a concern in any workplace, as illnesses vary per workplace and job. Occupational illnesses may result from acute and/or chronic exposures to hazardous conditions or substances at work:

- *Acute* – short-term health conditions usually lasting from seconds to hours at a time, showing up immediately or soon after a single exposure
- *Chronic* – long-term and potentially more permanent health conditions, showing up over a long period of time after continued or repeated exposure.

Educate your managers, supervisors, non-supervisory employees, and contractors on signs and symptoms of work-related exposures to equip them with the knowledge needed to recognize illness-causing materials. A lack of identifying these signs and symptoms may lead to delayed recognition, reporting, and assessment of an illness. Training your workforce prevents this issue.

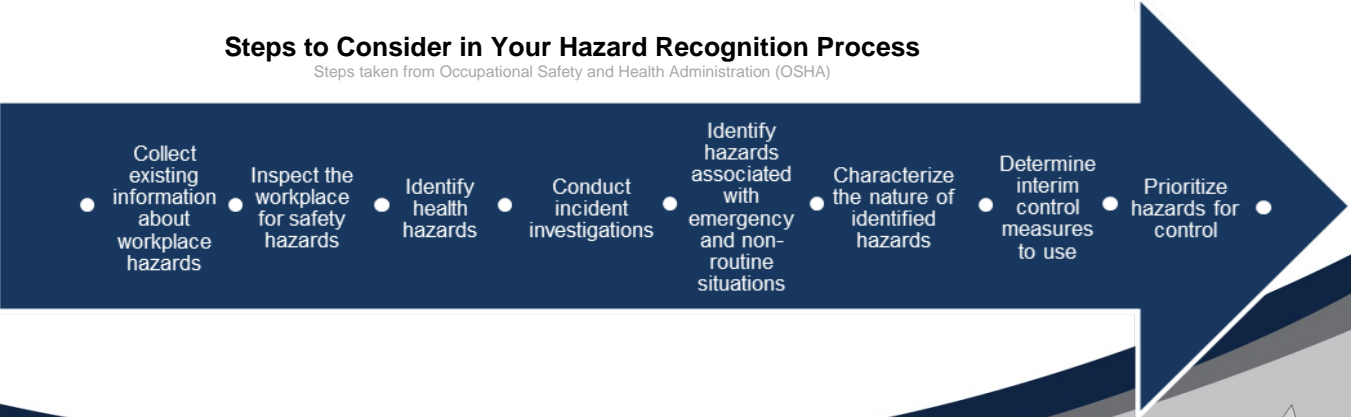
Use the information in this one pager to create a training for signs and symptoms of workplace-related illness in your workplace.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION & PREVENTION

Employ hazard identification processes (e.g., baseline hazard assessments, industrial hygiene sampling, inspections, pre-use analysis, review of safety data sheets [SDSs]) to identify and record workplace hazards. Determine possible work-related illnesses possibly occurring from the hazards. Research the signs and symptoms of each illness. Use licensed health care professionals for prevention, early recognition, and treatment of the occupational illnesses at your organization.

Steps to Consider in Your Hazard Recognition Process

Steps taken from Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

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- Collect existing information about workplace hazards
 - Inspect the workplace for safety hazards
 - Identify health hazards
 - Conduct incident investigations
 - Identify hazards associated with emergency and non-routine situations
 - Characterize the nature of identified hazards
 - Determine interim control measures to use
 - Prioritize hazards for control



Occupational Illness

Any abnormal health condition or disorder resulting from an event(s) or exposure(s) in the work environment

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DoD Safety Management Center of Excellence

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Use your hazard identification results and input from licensed health care professionals to develop your training. Make sure the training supports the work-related illnesses specific to your workplace. Identify the target audience for each illness since you may need multiple trainings for employees based on assigned job duties and hazards. For example, you wouldn't train an office employee on the signs and symptoms of x-ray exposure when they don't work near x-ray machines, but you might train them on carpal tunnel syndrome due to frequent and prolonged typing at a computer. Consider the following topics in your training:

- Definition of occupational illnesses
- Potential occupational hazard exposures
- Possible work-related illnesses
- Signs and symptoms of occupational illnesses
- Prevention measures
- Reporting procedures
- When to see a doctor.

DELIVERY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Provide training:

- As required by regulation
- Prior to job assignment
- At the time of initial assignment
- Periodically to serve as a refresher
- When an employee demonstrates they do not have the understanding and skills required to safely perform assigned duties
- When changes occur rendering previous training inadequate or incomplete.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMERGENCY CARE

In addition, ensure each work shift has access to SDSs and persons available trained in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), automated external defibrillators (AEDs), and/or emergency medical care to respond to work-related illnesses when they occur. These persons must be available within a reasonable time and distance from your organization. If you suspect someone has an exposure to a hazardous material and gets transported to a medical facility, make sure the SDS accompanies them.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smscx.org/>.

Examples of Illnesses Stemming from Exposure to Work-Related Hazards

Hazard	Example Illness
Heat/cold	Heat stress, frostbite
Noise	Hearing loss
Repetitive motion, awkward postures, vibration	Musculoskeletal disorders
Biological agents (e.g., anthrax, COVID-19, mold)	Infectious diseases, allergies, botulism
Heavy metals (e.g., arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, hexavalent chromium, lead)	Toxic metal poisoning, metal fume fever
Radiation (e.g., x-rays, radium, lasers)	Radiation sickness
Dusts (e.g., silica, fiberglass)	Silicosis
Bloodborne pathogens (e.g., blood, other potentially infectious material)	Hepatitis B, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
Direct contact with chemicals	Eczema, dermatitis, chemical burns
Fibers (e.g., asbestos)	Asbestosis, mesothelioma
Gases (e.g., carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulfide)	Carbon monoxide poisoning, pulmonary edema