



How to identify airborne contaminant hazards on farms: Case study

Dust from harvesting

During the busy harvest period, David, who owns a medium-sized wheat and barley farm in the Wheatbelt, notices that several workers have been coughing and experiencing throat irritation after working around grain handling activities.

David's farm employs six permanent workers and an additional four seasonal workers during peak harvest times. As the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), David has a duty under work health and safety (WHS) laws to protect his workers from hazards, including airborne contaminants.



Look at your workplace

David regularly inspects the farm, machinery, grain storage areas and work practices to identify potential hazards. He also speaks with his workers about their tasks and encourages them to report any concerns, as workers often have firsthand knowledge of where hazards occur.



Talk and consult with your workers

During discussions with his workers, David identifies that high levels of grain dust are being generated when harvesting, transferring grain from chaser bins, loading trucks and cleaning grain handling areas.

David knows that breathing in grain dust can irritate workers' airways and may cause health problems if exposure is not controlled. Dust can also contain mould spores and other contaminants, particularly when grain has been stored in damp conditions.

David works with his workers to plan ways to reduce exposure. Together they identify control measures, including:

- maintaining machinery cabins, seals and air filters to reduce dust entering operator areas
- reducing unnecessary exposure around grain transfer points
- using equipment and work practices that minimise dust generation
- keeping grain handling areas clean using methods that do not create additional airborne dust

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Talk and consult with your workers (continued)

- providing suitable respiratory protective equipment (RPE) for tasks where dust cannot be adequately controlled
- ensuring workers are trained in the correct use, fit and maintenance of RPE.

David also reminds workers to report symptoms such as coughing, breathing difficulties or throat irritation so hazards can be investigated early.



Reassess

After harvest, David reviews the control measures with his workers to check whether they have been effective. He identifies further improvements, including scheduling regular maintenance of machinery filters, reviewing grain handling procedures and including dust control checks in future harvest planning.

David continues to consult with his workers and updates the farm's procedures to ensure airborne contaminants are managed as conditions change.

By identifying the hazard early, consulting with workers and improving control measures, David reduces workers' exposure to grain dust and helps maintain a safer working environment during harvest.

