Department of **Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety**

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

WorkSafe Western Australia

How to identify airborne contaminant hazards in construction: Case study

Dusts, fumes and vapours in residential construction

Nick runs a small company in the residential construction sector. The work requires Nick and his sub-contractors to work with various timbers, and including hardwood and soft wood. The team use power tools and machinery to complete their work and often cut, shape and fix timber together. Sawing, planing, using their chisels and various power tools can generate a lot of wood dust.

Look at your workplace

As the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), Nick knows he has a duty under work health and safety (WHS) laws to keep his workers safe from exposure to hazards and minimise risks to their health.

Nick regularly inspects their worksite and he notices that at times when they are working inside, he can smell solvent, paint and adhesive fumes. This could be from other contractors at the worksite, such as painters or plasterers, contaminating the air with the dusts, fumes and vapours from the plaster, paints and glues that they work with. When the team sweep and clean up the workspace at the end of the day, Nick notices dusts in the air and on his clothes.

Nick has identified that he and his workers are at risk of breathing in hazardous fumes, vapours and dusts at work and now that he has identified these hazards, he is thinking about how he can minimise his and his workers' exposure to them.

Talk and consult with your workers

Nick minimises his workers' time inside by getting them to do as much of the cutting and sawing outside as possible, while also using on-tool dust extraction. This not only minimises the workers' exposure to wood dusts but also the dusts, fumes and vapours generated from other construction tasks.

Nick ensures his workers regularly clean their workspace to minimise dusts settling on equipment. Nick has provided his workers with personal protective equipment (PPE) suitable for the work they do. Depending on the job, this can include respiratory protective equipment (RPE) and eye protection. Nick has ensured his workers have had training on how to correctly fit their RPE to protect their health.

Read labels and safety data sheets

Nick has also read the safety data sheets and labels for all the hazardous chemicals his team use and has ensured he and his sub-contractors are aware of how to use and store them safely to minimise harm to workers.

Learn more about managing hazardous chemical risk.