

## 3.6 million Australian workers exposed to carcinogens

December 23 2013

---

Australian researchers have found that a staggering 40 percent of workers are exposed to cancer-causing agents in their current jobs, with men at higher risk than women.

The study revealed that the 3.6 million Australian workers most likely to be exposed to carcinogens lived in regional areas and often included men and women working in farming, mining and transport.

Unlike lifestyle cancer risks (alcohol, diet) people do not have a choice about exposure to carcinogens in their workplace, with the top four occupational cancer risks being sun exposure, diesel engine exhaust, environmental tobacco smoke and the solvent benzene.

Professor Lin Fritschi, from The University of Western Australia and the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research in Perth, (formerly the WA Institute for Medical Research) said the results were shocking.

"These figures are higher than ever before because we questioned workers from small and medium enterprises including people who are self-employed," she said. "In the past the only data available came from big organisations with resources such as Occupational Health and Safety staff to conduct surveys."

Carcinogens such as UV exposure tended to affect farmers, painters and metal workers. Farmers were also at a higher [cancer risk](#) from diesel engine exhaust, as were heavy vehicle drivers and miners. Environmental

tobacco smoke was a danger for hospitality workers, but also painters and plumbers who included the group "smoko" in their work routine, even if they didn't smoke themselves.

"This study allows us to pinpoint where there are cancer risks, such as workers exposed to environmental [tobacco smoke](#) during the daily "smoko," Professor Fritschi said. "There is legislation in place to prevent smoking in the workplace but at the moment this is often not enforced."

The collaboration by The University of Western Australia and the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research as well as Sydney and Monash Universities, was based on a random sample of 5023 Australian [workers](#) aged between 18 and 65.

Telephone interviews were conducted using a web-based application, OccIDEAS, in which participants were asked about their job tasks and pre-defined algorithms automatically assigned exposure to each person. OccIDEAS includes questionnaires specifically written for 58 different occupations.

"I've already had contact from researchers in Singapore and the U.K. who may want to follow this model in their own countries," Professor Fritschi said.

Funding for the research came from a National Health and Medical Research Council grant and Cancer Council Western Australia.

**More information:** "Estimated prevalence of exposure to occupational carcinogens in Australia (2011–2012)." Renee N Carey, Timothy R Driscoll, Susan Peters, Deborah C Glass, Alison Reid, Geza Benke, Lin Fritschi, *Occup Environ Med* 2014;71:1 55-62 Published Online First: 24 October 2013 [DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2013-101651](https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2013-101651)

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: 3.6 million Australian workers exposed to carcinogens (2013, December 23) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-million-australian-workers-exposed-carcinogens.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.