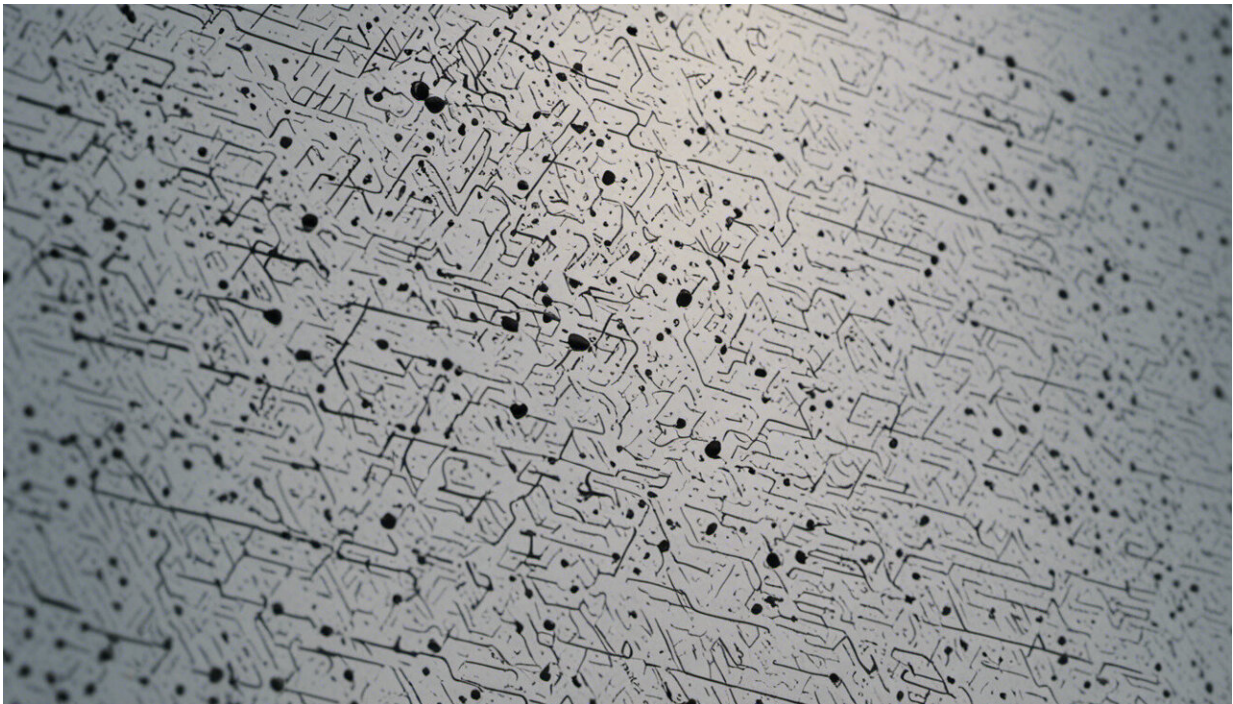


Research pinpoints chemical irritants in the workplace

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

In an Australian first Curtin University scientists have compiled a comprehensive list detailing and grouping asthma-causing agents found across the nation's businesses.

The list includes hundreds of substances including dust, medicines and

commonly found chemicals.

"Some of the ones that are really common for causing asthma [are] flour, latex – particularly latex gloves - and isocyanates, found in some paints. They are known to be a problem," Curtin University epidemiologist and lead researcher Professor Lin Fritschi says.

"The other ones that everyone knows about are various animals and animal hair—cats, chickens and cows—and rat urine, so people working in laboratories with rats and mice often get asthma from their work."

Carpenters, panel beaters, welders, laboratory workers and farmers are among the occupations most likely to be exposed to the asthma-causing agents, Prof Fritschi says

Every year, up to 3000 people are diagnosed with asthma that is brought on or exacerbated by their work.

Prof Fritschi believes this number underrepresents the problem.

Sufferers can experience life-threatening health problems and wheeze, cough or feel a tightening of the chest on the job, while their symptoms ease on days off.

Australia lacks systematic reporting system

However, Australia does not have a national scheme for the reporting of occupational asthma or asthmagens and few cases have received workers compensation, according to the researchers.

Until now, there has been no systemic approach for categorising asthmagens and a lot of problem chemicals were not linked to the condition in existing documentation, Prof Fritschi says.

"I think this list is useful for people treating asthma, for employers or health and safety people or if someone has an employee with asthma to help them identify the problem," she says.

According to the study, asthmagens were identified through work health and safety classification databases from across the globe.

One in six cases of adult-onset [asthma](#) is linked to occupation and some sufferers are forced to quit their profession, Prof Fritschi says.

The researchers now plan to survey how many people across Australia are exposed to asthmagens in the workplace and what control measures are currently in place.

"We want to know if you were going to try to reduce [occupational asthma](#) in society where would you best focusing your efforts?" Prof Fritschi says.

The collaborative study included researchers from Monash University and the Universities of Western Australia and Sydney and was published this month in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

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