



WORKSAFE
ACT SAFE +
HEALTHY
WORKPLACES

STRATEGY FOR
PREVENTING
OCCUPATIONAL LUNG
DISEASES 2021-2023



BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

WorkSafe ACT's functions are set out in the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act), and include:

- promoting an understanding of and acceptance and compliance with the WHS Act or another territory law relating to work health and safety (WHS), and
- researching and development of educational and other programs for the purpose of promoting WHS.

Occupational lung diseases (OLDx) are a priority condition under [WorkSafe ACT's Strategic Plan 2020-2024](#).

Occupational lung diseases span a range of acute and chronic conditions and include occupational asthma and work exacerbated asthma, silicosis and pneumoconioses.

The ACT workforce is significantly different to the national context, with several of the highest risk national industries not significantly represented in the ACT. For instance, there is less and lower-risk agriculture and manufacturing industry representation and no mining industry in the Territory. This profile effectively excludes a number of OLDx, which is also reflected in the workers' compensation claims data.

WorkSafe ACT's *Strategy for Preventing Occupational Lung Diseases 2021-23* (the Strategy) is developed in alignment with WorkSafe ACT's governance structure and encompasses the policies within:

- [Strategic Plan 2020-2024](#)
- [Statement of Operational Intent](#), and
- [Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2020-2024](#).

The Strategy is based on WorkSafe ACT's data and business intelligence and the four high-level strategies that underpin its activities, as set out in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024:

 <p>Ensure fair and firm enforcement against non-compliance</p>	 <p>Minimise physical and psychological harm and improve WHS practice and culture</p>	 <p>Engage with stakeholders to better understand and respond to current and emerging WHS issues</p>	 <p>Create an exemplary regulator</p>
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PURPOSE

This Strategy is the overarching document that captures WorkSafe ACT's approach to preventing OLDx.

The Strategy will guide the activities of WorkSafe ACT to enforce the management of exposures that may lead to OLDx in the ACT over the next three years. The Strategy also provides for targeted



guidance for work-related and work exacerbated asthma, silica-related diseases and the management of welding fumes.

EVIDENCE BASE

OLDx are underreported or vaguely coded within workers' compensation data. This is due to the latency and nature of many OLDx making it difficult to prove a link to a work exposure or workplace.

In 2019/20, of the ACT claims coded to the respiratory system and chest (n=11):

- 2 were related to crystalline silica
- 2 were related to asthma caused by weather or fire, flame and smoke, and
- 7 were related to exposure to chemicals, industrial gases or fumes.

Of these claims there was no commonality to enable identification of priority occupations.

Nationally, 1 in 3 Australians are affected by a chronic respiratory condition. However, it is unclear how many are caused or exacerbated by work. It is estimated that 15% of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and 10-30% of lung cancers can be attributed to work.

It is important to note that given the long latency of numerous OLDx, many cases may be diagnosed after retirement and so will not appear in workers' compensation data. The workers' compensation data is further confounded by the difficulty in linking work exposures to a range of OLDx. A very large portion of claims over recent periods have not been distinctly classified, which makes it difficult to interpret trends over time for specific OLDx.

OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the Strategy are:



1. Increase awareness of managing exposures that cause occupational lung diseases



2. Support compliance with managing exposure risks



3. Enforce compliance in managing exposures that lead to occupational lung diseases



4. Build WorkSafe ACT's capability and capacity as a responsive regulator for preventing occupational lung diseases

Supporting the key objectives

Table 1 outlines the rationale for each objective and possible supporting activities. The activities for each objective are flexible and targeted based on ACT specific data and experience. These activities



can also be adjusted to incorporate any significant local or national advances, for example, WHS regulations for managing exposures that lead to OLDx or a Code of Practice.

Table 1: Rationale and possible activities to support key objectives

	Objective	Rationale	Possible activities
1.	Increase awareness of managing exposures that cause occupational lung diseases.	Duty holder awareness and knowledge of existing duties and obligations to manage exposures that cause occupational lung diseases needs to improve before compliance can be achieved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted engagement with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> duty holders to build awareness, and experts on occupational lung disease risk factors and exposure management. General and targeted awareness campaigns about workplace exposures.
2.	Support compliance with managing exposure risks.	<p>Poor management of exposures that cause occupational lung diseases is common.</p> <p>In part, this can be attributed to a lack of clarity by on how to appropriately identify the hazards and effectively assess and control risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of existing resources and development or adoption of new resources. Develop and promote a risk assessment process for exposures that lead to occupational lung diseases. Development and promotion of prevention-focused materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide for managing air quality and pollution at the workplace Guide for working in heat and weather, and Guide for managing welding fumes.
3.	Enforce compliance in managing exposures that lead to occupational lung diseases.	The ACT community has the right to expect that WHS breaches will be consistently enforced in line with WorkSafe ACT's <i>Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2020-2024</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive compliance and enforcement campaigns. Full use of compliance tools, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing advice on compliance issuing Notices, and commencing prosecutions.
4.	Build WorkSafe ACT's capability and capacity as a responsive regulator for preventing occupational lung diseases.	WorkSafe ACT requires the appropriate capability and infrastructure to deliver the stated objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted recruitment and broad inspectorate training to improve technical knowledge about occupational lung diseases and their causes. Develop and implement compliance and enforcement resources.



PRIORITY HAZARDS

Priority hazards for the Strategy are identified through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, including Salesforce (WorkSafe ACT's case management system), investigations, trend analysis and stakeholder feedback.

The hazards identified for priority for this strategy include:



Work-related and work exacerbated asthma



Silica-related diseases



Chemicals, dusts, gases and fumes



Weather and air quality

EVALUATION

WorkSafe ACT is committed to evaluating and reporting activities in support of its Strategies. This information will be used to inform subsequent updates.

The Strategy will undergo evaluation at 12 and 24 months and a final evaluation report of activities and achievements in the first quarter of 2024.

The progress of the Strategy will be reported in WorkSafe ACT's Annual Report 2022-25 as published on the WorkSafe ACT website: <https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/>