

Safety Talk

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

About 12 million Americans have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD and there may be another 12 million that are undiagnosed. COPD is a group of diseases that limits the flow of air in the lungs and makes breathing difficult. It includes emphysema, chronic bronchitis and in some cases asthma. COPD is progressive, meaning that it will get worse over time. Tobacco use is the prime cause of COPD, although asthma, air pollution at work and at home and secondhand smoke also play a role.

In the US, COPD includes two main conditions of the lung; emphysema and chronic bronchitis. In emphysema, the walls of the air sacs that make up the lungs are damaged. In a normal lung, the air sacs should be small and many like a bunch of grapes. In a lung with emphysema, the walls of the air sacs are destroyed, leaving fewer, larger air sacs. This reduces the amount of oxygen that can enter the blood. Chronic bronchitis causes the lining of the airways to be continuously irritated and inflamed, causing the lining to thicken and lots of mucus to form, making it very difficult to breathe.

In 2005, 126,005 people older than 25 died of COPD in the United States. This number continues to rise. Most people who have COPD smoke or used to smoke. However other factors also play a role. Long-term exposure to lung irritants is also a major risk factor. These irritants include secondhand smoke, air pollution and chemical fumes and dust from the environment or workplace.

Construction areas are tough on your lungs. There's always dust of some kind along with fumes from different chemicals like adhesives or sealants. Although your job may not kick up dust or use chemicals that produce irritating fumes, it's important to realize that your lungs may be affected by everything going on in the workplace.

COPD is progressive and as yet there is no cure. There are treatments but nothing can reverse the damage to your lungs. The best way to treat COPD is to not develop it at all; this is best done by never starting to smoke or by quitting as soon as possible. The less you smoke in your lifetime will help reduce your chances of developing COPD.

You also want to avoid the lung irritants at work that contribute to COPD. There may be alternate materials or work practices that can be used that will reduce your contact with chemical irritants. Discuss your ideas and concerns with your supervisor.

COPD is a major cause of permanent disability and the third leading cause of death in the US. There is no cure and no way to reverse the damage to the lungs. Protect your lungs by not smoking and being aware of the other irritants that you may be inhaling, both at work and at home. Prevention is the best way to treat COPD.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What is the major cause of COPD and why?

What are the two lung conditions that combine to cause COPD?

MEETING / TRAINING ATTENDANCE ROSTER

COMPANY: _____

_____ SAFETY MEETING

JOB/DEPT: _____

_____ SAFETY TRAINING

DATE: ___/___/___

TIME: _____

TOPICS ADDRESSED: _____

EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURES

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

ACTION TAKEN: _____

Supervisor's Signature

____/____/____
Date

Safety Coordinator's Signature

____/____/____
Date