It's No Accident is the WHS newsletter of the AMWU.

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Is your workplace properly ventilated? (continues from front)

a ventilation engineer or occupational hygienist about whether CO2 monitoring is required, and which type is best for your workplace's circumstances.

Types of ventilation

Natural ventilation brings fresh air into a building or room using passive forces, like winds or breezes. Natural ventilation only works when passive forces are available, and when windows and inlet and exhaust openings are kept open.

Natural ventilation should only be used for general comfort – **not** as an engineering control measure for atmospheric contaminants and fumes.

Most workplaces will need **mechanical ventilation** like fans, ducts, and air-conditioning systems to get good ventilation. Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in a workplace should use fresh air supply, not recirculated air.

Anyone with an air conditioner at home knows they need regular cleaning and maintenance to avoid dust, algae, and other potentially harmful materials building up. HVAC systems are no different – all the components in a HVAC system must be kept in good working order to prevent the build-up of dust, debris, and bacteria. **This is your employer/PCBU's responsibility.**

Finally, air purifiers or cleaners fitted with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters can lower the concentration of airborne contaminants, including viruses, and are useful additions in areas with poor ventilation. It is important to place air purifiers properly so they won't interfere with existing HVAC airflow.

You have the right to fresh and clean air at work. **If you think your workplace might be poorly ventilated, talk to your delegate or health and safety officer (HSR).** •

Manufacturing among the most dangerous industries

New figures from Safe Work Australia (SFA) reveal that manufacturing workers are among the workers most at risk of injury and illness.

The new SFA *Australian Workers' Compensation Statistics 2020-21* report provides details of the 130,915 serious workers' compensation claims that were accepted in the 2020-21 financial year.

Manufacturing workers were most likely to suffer injuries and musculoskeletal disorders, including joint, muscle and tendon injuries, wounds and lacerations, and fractures. Mental health conditions were by far the most commonly reported diseases.

However, manufacturing workers are making far fewer injury and illness claims than they used to. In the 2000-01 financial year, manufacturing workers made 26,507 compensation claims – 46 percent more than in 2020-21.

In 2020/21, manufacturing workers:

Made **14,663 serious workplace injury and illness claims**

Suffered **17.6 serious incidents per 1,000 workers** – more than construction, transport, and mining

Made **11.3% percent of all serious injury and illness claims** despite making up only 6.7% of the workforce

JAN 2023

AMWU Health and Safety News

it's no accident

AMWU
AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURING WORKERS' UNION

Is your workplace properly ventilated?

Every year, thousands of Australian workers develop occupational asthma and other lung diseases because they breathe in dust, fumes, or other airborne contaminants at work – often because of a lack of proper ventilation.

What is ventilation?

Ventilation is the movement of fresh and clean air into an indoor area to improve air quality. Good ventilation stops potentially harmful airborne contaminants from building up in the air to dangerous levels.

As the last three years of the Covid-19 pandemic showed us, properly ventilated indoor spaces are vital in reducing the transmission of airborne diseases. Viruses spread fastest in areas with poor ventilation or air circulation, like aeroplanes, train carriages, and crowded worksites.

But Covid isn't the only reason workplaces need proper ventilation. Work processes that release harmful levels of airborne contaminants like welding fumes, acid mist, and solvent vapour can cause serious injury and illness. From 2011 to 2021, more than 6,000 Australians lodged workers' compensation claims for occupational lung diseases.

Your employer/PCBU (person conducting a business or undertaking) must provide a properly ventilated workplace so you and your fellow workers can do your jobs without risk to health and safety. Fresh, clean air should be drawn from outside the workplace and circulated through the site.

Monitoring indoor air quality

Your employer/PCBU must make sure that no one in the workplace is exposed to a dangerous substance in an airborne concentration that exceeds exposure standards. Air monitoring is the most effective way to make sure the air in a workplace is safe.

Although carbon dioxide (CO2) levels are not a direct measure of possible exposure to airborne contaminants, checking levels using a CO2 monitor may help identify poorly ventilated areas.

According to the UK Health and Safety Executive, a consistent indoor air concentration of less than **800 parts per million (ppm)** of CO2 in the air likely indicates that a space is well ventilated. An average of between **800-1500ppm** means the site's ventilation needs improvement, while an average of **1500ppm** CO2 concentration or higher likely means the area has poor ventilation. Workplaces with lots of talking or physical labouring might need more ventilation to keep CO2 at safe levels.

CO2 levels should be measured at different times and places to get a better indication of how the ventilation system is working under different conditions. Your employer/PCBU should consult

(Continues on back)

DOES YOUR BOSS...

TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY?

You have the right to clean air at work.

If your workplace is poorly ventilated, talk to your delegate or HSR.

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