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

Please send feedback and story ideas to **amwu@amwu.org.au.**

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Our Facebook group for AMWU HSRs: www.facebook.com/groups/amwuhsrs/

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You can now register your exposure

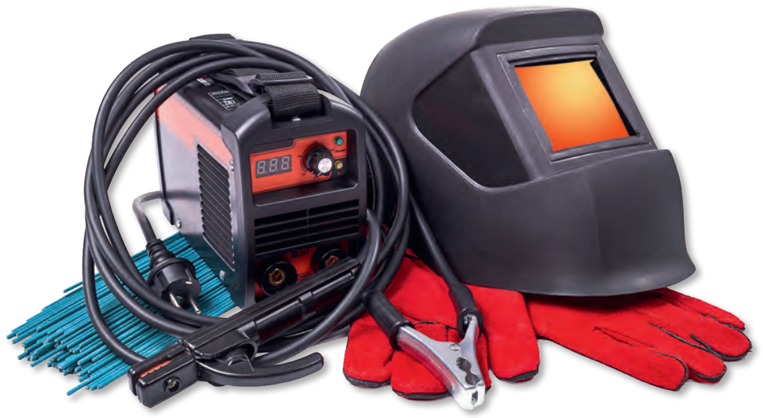
The National Welding Fumes Exposure Register is a secure, confidential online register where you can make a record of your workplace exposure to welding fumes. Very few workers suffering welding fume related illnesses are compensated because doctors aren't likely to take a proper industrial history.

Using the register will provide you with a personal industrial history in case you need it for any workers compensation claims. It usually takes less than 5 minutes to complete and you'll be emailed a record.

Over time, the deidentified data (meaning you can't tell a person's identity) will also help researchers studying welding fumes and its related illness. •

Visit the National Welding Fumes Exposure Register

How to weld safely



Welding work can be done safely by applying hazard controls which eliminate or reduce the risk of exposure to welding fumes to the lowest possible level.

Here's how to weld safely:

- Your workplace should use local exhaust ventilation systems to remove fumes and gases from your breathing zone. Any fume extraction system inlet should be as close to the plume source as possible to remove the maximum amount of fumes and gases. The exhaust points must be filtered and kept away from workers.
- Use appropriate respiratory protection equipment such as powered or supplied air respirators.
- Your workplace's control monitoring system must include atmospheric and worker health monitoring.
- Welding surfaces should be as clean as practicable. Oil or grease can potentially increase the overall exposure to airborne concentrations of hazardous particles or vapours.
- Position yourself in respect of the fume source to avoid or reduce your exposure to welding fumes e.g. upwind if working in an open or outdoor environment or using natural draughts inside.
- Look at your consumable options to see if there are less-toxic alternatives or a welding type that produces less fumes.

More information can be found in the Welding Processes Code of Practice, using the QR code below. •

SEPT 2023

AMWU Health and Safety News

it's no accident

AMWU
AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURING WORKERS' UNION

We're making working around welding fumes safer

Thousands of AMWU members across the country weld or work around welding. From building transport and wind turbines to repairing machinery, the work they do keeps things running.

It's work they should be able to do knowing every safety measure we have is in place.

Like any job, welding has its risks. Welding fumes are toxic and can cause serious illness, including cancer. But, importantly, exposure to welding fumes is preventable.

That's why the AMWU has launched the Lower Limit Live Longer campaign. We're calling on SafeWork Australia (SWA) to help keep workers safe by lowering the limit for exposure to welding fumes in Australian workplaces.

We've also created National Welding Fumes Exposure Register so any worker who may have been exposed can create a record for their future reference (see back page for more info).

LOWER LIMIT LIVE LONGER

It's estimated that 189 workers were diagnosed with lung cancer caused by welding fumes in Australia last year.

Based on Australian lung cancer data for 2022 and the attributable fraction of 1.3% associated with welding fumes. Source: Cancer Care Ontario, Occupational Cancer Research Centre, *Burden of occupational cancer in Ontario.*

Why is this important?

Welding fumes have been classified as a Group 1 carcinogen since 2017, and we know that welders have an almost 50% higher risk of developing lung cancer. Welding fumes are also linked to metal fume fever, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, melanoma of the eye and deafness.

But the limit set by the workplace exposure standard for welding fumes hasn't been updated since the 1990s. It's out of date and leaves workers unnecessarily exposed, just by doing their job. This includes both welders and people who work around welding.

What can you do?

The current limit in the workplace exposure standard for welding fumes is 5mg/1m^3. We're calling on SWA to immediately lower the limit to 1mg/m^3, in line with other countries such as the Netherlands.

AMWU members stopped SWA from getting rid of the exposure standard altogether back in 2021 – now we're going to make it better. But we need to make SWA listen to workers!

Sign the petition to make sure SWA hears workers' demands loud and clear.

You can find more information about the campaign at **www.amwu.org.au/lowerlimit**

If you work around welding, it's important that you talk to your workmates, register yourself if you've been exposed, and hold a lunch-and-learn session on the campaign in your workplace (look out for an email on this or speak to your AMWU branch). •

How do welding fumes hurt you?

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Lung cancer: Welders are 48% more likely to get lung cancer, linked to exposure to fumes containing chromium VI, nickel, manganese and iron. Research is now suggesting all metal fumes could be carcinogenic.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD): Significant exposure to noxious particles or gases leads to chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes obstructed airflow. It's common, preventable and treatable.

Parkinson's syndrome: Manganese-induced parkinsonism is characterised by decreased coordination, difficulty walking, loss of balance, shaking and slurred speech.

Chronic bronchitis: Exposure is associated with increased frequency in symptoms, defined as cough and sputum production for at least 3 months in 2 consecutive years. Extended periods of inflammation can cause long-term breathing difficulties.

Occupational asthma: Work-related asthma is caused by inhaling irritants in the workplace, including some metals in welding fumes. The substances can cause asthma to develop or trigger symptoms in someone who already has it.

Kidney damage: Caused by cadmium oxide, fluorides and lead. There are also possible links to kidney cancer.

Hearing loss: Welding fumes are ototoxic – meaning they cause hearing loss, tinnitus and vertigo – and can damage auditory nerves or the cochlear. Exposure to chemicals or heavy metals (welding fumes) combined with loud noise cause more harm to your hearing than either exposure alone.

Reduced fertility: Male welders display an inferior sperm count and quality. Those welding stainless steel appear to be more at risk.

Pneumonia: Welders have an increased risk of developing pneumococcal pneumonia, which can cause part of your lung to fill up with mucus making it hard to breathe.

Metal fume fever: Zinc oxide fumes, typically produced when welding galvanised steel, can cause an immediate flu-like illness. Common symptoms are fever, chills, muscle aches, chest pain, non-productive cough, metallic taste in the mouth, headache and fatigue. Symptoms develop within 48 hours of exposure and resolve within 1–2 days, but some treatment may be necessary to relieve symptoms.

Other problems: Include heart disease, chronic gastritis and gastroduodentitis (which cause the stomach to become inflamed), small intestine and stomach ulcers, lead poisoning and neurological problems.

Find out what we're doing to make working around welding fumes safer

LOWER LIMIT LIVE LONGER

Authorised by Steve Murphy, AMWU National Secretary, August 2023.