Carcinogens are Cancer Causing Chemicals



What's at Stake?

A carcinogen is any substance that can cause cancer. They are chronic toxins that cause damage after repeated or long-term exposure. For some people, the workplace can be a source of exposure to some carcinogens, such as asbestos, benzene, or formaldehyde.

What's the Danger?

Benzene is a colorless, flammable liquid with a sweet odor. It is among the 20 most widely used chemicals in the United States. It is used mainly as a starting material in making other chemicals, including plastics, lubricants, rubbers, dyes, detergents, drugs, and pesticides. The main route of exposure is through inhalation, but it can also be absorbed through the skin, but because liquid benzene evaporates quickly, this is less common.

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring minerals that occur naturally as bundles of fibers. These fibers are found in soil and rocks in many parts of the world. There are 2 main types of asbestos and both have been linked to cancer. Most exposures come from inhaling asbestos fibers during the mining and processing of asbestos, when making asbestos-containing products, or when installing asbestos insulation. It can also occur when older buildings are demolished or renovated, or when older asbestos-containing materials begin to break down.

Formaldehyde is a colorless, strong-smelling gas used in making building materials and many household products, including pressed-wood products; glues and adhesives; permanent-press fabrics; paper product coatings; certain insulation materials; and to make other chemicals. When dissolved in water it is called formalin, which is commonly used as an industrial disinfectant, and as a preservative in funeral homes and medical labs. Exposure occurs mainly through inhalation or by absorbing liquids containing formaldehyde through the skin.

How to Protect Yourself

1. Always follow safe work practices, clean-up and disposal procedures.
2. Wear the right kind of PPE **each and every** time there is the potential for exposure.
3. Stop smoking – benzene and formaldehyde are both found in cigarette smoke.
4. If you are concerned about exposure talk to your safety manager or supervisor.

Final Word

Exposure to carcinogens doesn’t have to be deadly. Be informed about the hazards, follow safe work practices and wear your PPE to protect yourself against exposure hazards.