

CONNECTICUT EPIDEMIOLOGIST

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OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE IN CONNECTICUT

Each year, occupational diseases cause disability and death in thousands of workers in Connecticut. Approximately 10,000 new cases of occupational disease occur in Connecticut each year, with an estimated 66,000 workers having symptoms related to occupational diseases. These are conservative estimates because occupational diseases are typically under-recognized and under-reported by health care providers in Connecticut.¹

The Occupational Disease Surveillance System (ODSS) was developed to monitor occupational disease in Connecticut and to develop prevention strategies. The ODSS is managed by the Environmental Epidemiology and Occupational Health Division (EEOH) within the Department of Public Health (DPH), in collaboration with the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Workers' Compensation Commission (WCC). Although occupational disease reporting has been required since 1949, DPH automated the ODSS in 1991 and completed the first full year of surveillance in 1992. The ODSS compiles information from the *Physician's Report of Occupational Disease* form.

Based on findings from ODSS data, DPH targets public health education efforts toward workers, employers and physicians for high priority diseases, such as occupational asthma, silicosis, lead poisoning and occupational dermatitis. DPH also investigates workplace disease clusters (two or more cases). It is our goal to work jointly with employers to reduce employee exposures that can lead to occupational diseases.

Since 1992, the four most commonly reported disease categories have been:

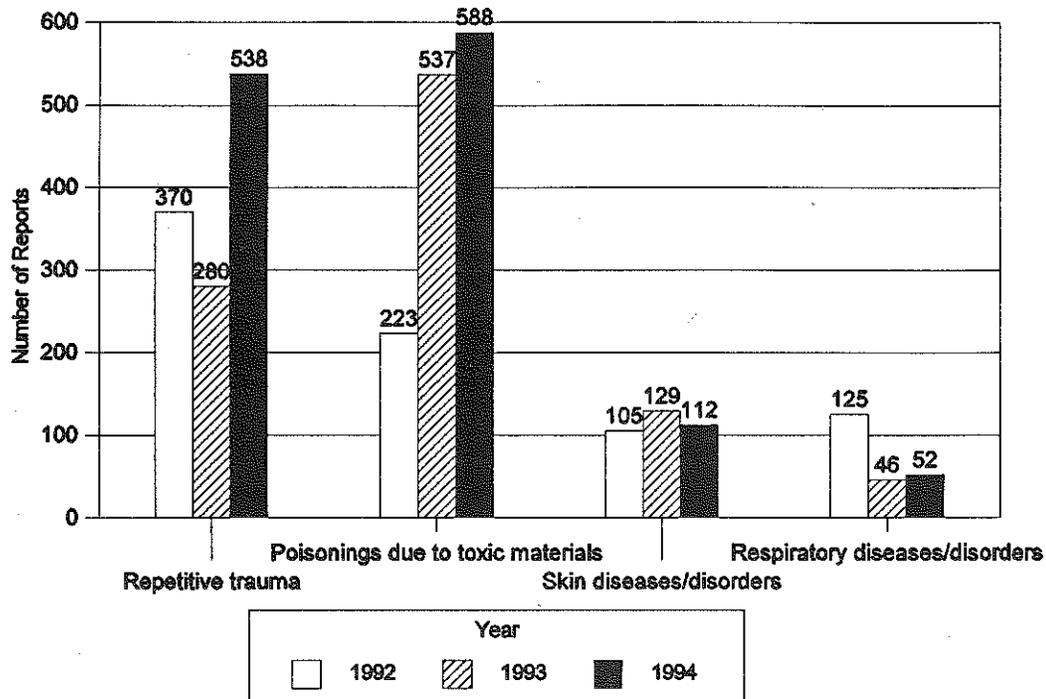
- ◆ repetitive trauma (e.g., carpal tunnel syndrome, epicondylitis, tendonitis)
- ◆ poisoning due to toxic materials (e.g., lead, mercury, various chemicals)
- ◆ skin diseases and disorders (e.g., contact dermatitis, urticaria)
- ◆ respiratory diseases and disorders (e.g., asthma, silicosis, asbestosis)

Report Occupational Diseases for 1995 Now!

To obtain a copy of the *Physician's Report of Occupational Disease* form, call DPH/EEOH at (860)240-9029. Mail completed forms to DOL, Division of Occupational Safety and Health, at 38 Wolcott Hill Road, Wethersfield, CT, 06019.

Thank you!

Figure 1
Most Commonly Reported Occupational Disease Categories in CT
CT Occupational Disease Surveillance Data, 1992-1994



As shown in Figure 1, *repetitive trauma disorders* and *poisonings due to toxic materials* account for the greatest number of the occupational disease reports over the past three years. The latter category includes individuals with blood lead levels (BLLs) $\geq 20 \mu\text{g/dL}$ reported to the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology Surveillance Program (ABLES) via laboratory reports. The larger number in the respiratory diseases and disorders category in 1992 compared to 1993 and 1994 is due to "back reporting", or reporting of cases that were diagnosed *before* 1992.

Occupational diseases are preventable. When occupational diseases are reported regularly, we are better able to identify disease clusters, conduct follow-up and prevent further disease in the workplace. Please help make the workplace safe by reporting occupational diseases. To receive a report form, or more information on reporting, please call DPH/EEOH at (860) 240-9029.

Physician's Report of Occupational Disease Form

The *Physician's Report of Occupational Disease* form has been revised (10/95) to incorporate user recommendations. Title 3, Sec. 31-40a of the Connecticut General Statutes requires physicians to report occupational diseases to DOL, which in turn sends the reports to DPH/EEOH. Clinics receiving funding from DOL are required to report occupational injuries in addition to illnesses. All Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) recordable injuries should continue to be recorded on the OSHA 200 log. An OSHA Recordable Injury is any injury involving lost work days, restriction of work or motion, transfer to another job, loss of consciousness or medical treatment beyond first aid.

Reference:

1. *Occupational Disease in Connecticut*, State of Connecticut, Departments of Health and Labor and the Occupational Health Surveillance Work Group, February, 1990.

ABLES UPDATE

The Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology Surveillance Program (ABLES) is a National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-funded program that has been in place in Connecticut since 1992. Surveillance is based upon:

- ◆ laboratory reports of blood lead levels (BLLs) $\geq 10 \mu\text{g/dL}$, in persons 16 years of age or older, who live or work in Connecticut, and;
- ◆ physician reports of BLLs $\geq 20 \mu\text{g/dL}$.

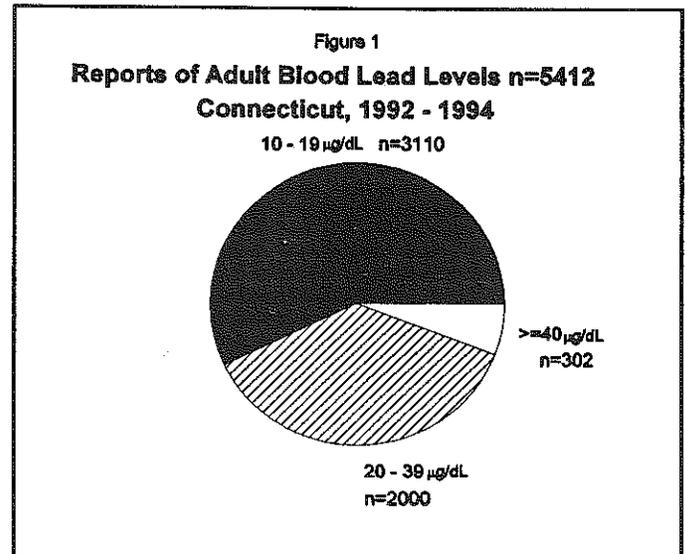
Laboratory reporting is specified under C.G.S. 19a-110. Physician reporting is specified under C.G.S. 31-40a.

As part of the follow-up and referral protocol, persons with BLLs $\geq 20 \mu\text{g/dL}$ are mailed a fact sheet and questionnaire pertaining to lead exposure. Persons with BLLs $\geq 40 \mu\text{g/dL}$ are contacted by an Occupational Health staff member, and information about workplace exposure is collected. The employer is also contacted, and an effort is made to work collaboratively with them to design strategies to reduce lead exposures in the workplace.

From 1992 through 1994, inclusive, the ABLES Program recorded 5412 BLL reports $\geq 10 \mu\text{g/dL}$ in 2826 adults (Figure 1). A number of adults had their blood tested for lead more than once during this time period. For those occupationally exposed, routine monitoring programs exist as specified by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). There are presently two OSHA standards that apply to workers exposed to lead on the job. One standard covers general industry (29 CFR 1910.1025). The other standard pertains to the construction industry (29 CFR 1926.62).

ABLES reports included workers in various professions, such as painters, blasters, iron workers, laborers, welders, and foremen. Most lead poisonings in adults result from occupational

exposure, do-it-yourself home renovations or hobbies using lead-containing materials. For more information about the ABLES program, call DPH/EEOH at (860) 240-9029.



LEAD PAINT HAZARD CONTROL PROGRAM

The Occupational Health & Special Projects Program within DPH/EEOH is taking a lead role in a special project called the Lead Paint Hazard Control Program to protect workers during lead abatement of residential dwellings.

The program includes case management of abatement workers, as well as for children living in residences undergoing abatement, worker and community-based health education, and environmental monitoring for lead during abatement. Blood lead levels of abatement workers will be tracked by EEOH along with the ABLES program. A Core Consultant Team will work with five municipalities (Hartford, New Britain, Norwich, Waterbury and Windham) designated to participate in the Lead Paint Hazard Control Program. Recently enacted regulations requiring licensing and certification of lead abatement workers by DPH will be utilized.

OCCUPATIONAL ASTHMA NEWSLETTER

The Lead Paint Hazard Control Program is a three year initiative funded by a \$6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) (formerly the Department of Housing) and DPH. This is being combined with matching funds from state sources, for a total of \$17.4 million to be used to conduct lead abatement of residences in the five municipalities.

Each participating municipality is offering grants (on a forgivable loan basis) to landlords to conduct lead abatement on 140 housing units per municipality, for a program total of 700 housing units. Areas where children are at high risk for lead poisoning will receive priority. The Lead Paint Hazard Control Program allows for funding of other renovation work to be done at the same time as lead abatement work.

Additional HUD-funded programs are taking place in Manchester, New Haven and Stamford. These programs are designed to reduce lead exposure from lead paint in/on residential dwellings. For more information about the Lead Paint Hazard Control Program, call DPH/EEOH at (860) 240-9029.

Occupational asthma is a debilitating disease, but can be prevented with proper workplace environmental controls. In response to the increasing number of asthma cases among workers in Connecticut, the first quarterly issue of a newsletter called *Occupational Airways* was released in mid-December. The focus of the newsletter is primarily on occupational asthma with other work-related respiratory diseases and disorders being included. It is designed to be a reference for health care providers. To obtain a copy of the newsletter, or to learn more about occupational asthma, contact DPH/EEOH at (860) 240-9029.

Save The Date

May 8, 1996

Turning Diagnosis Into Prevention:

An occupational medicine seminar

for health care providers

Details to be announced

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