

## A growing concern

# Contamination of workers' homes worldwide problem

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Workers can inadvertently carry hazardous materials home from work on their clothes, skin, hair, tools and in their vehicles.

As a result, families of these workers have been exposed to hazardous substances and have developed various health effects.

In 1992, the Workers' Family Protection Act directed the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to conduct a study of contamination of workers' homes with hazardous chemicals and substances (including infectious agents) transported from the workplace.

NIOSH found that contamination of workers' homes is a worldwide problem; incidents have been reported from 28 countries and from 36 States in the United States. Such incidents have resulted in a wide range of health effects and death among workers' families exposed to toxic substances and infectious agents.

About half of the reports of health effects have appeared in the last 10 years, revealing new sources of contamination

In the NIOSH study, the following contaminants were found to have caused serious health effects among workers' families:

- Beryllium;
- Asbestos;
- Lead;
- Pesticides;
- Caustic farm products;
- Chlorinated hydrocarbons;
- Mercury;
- Estrogenic substances;
- Asthmagens and allergens;
- Arsenic;
- Fibrous glass;
- Cyclothriethylenetriamine;
- Infectious agents. Preventive measures that were found to be effective when used the

workplace include:

- Reducing exposures in the workplace by using good safety practices;
- Changing clothes before going home;
- Showering before leaving work;
- Storing street clothes in separate areas of the workplace to prevent their contamination;
- Prohibiting removal of toxic substances or contaminated items from the workplace;
- Preventing family members from visiting the workplace.

Preventive measures that have been used successfully at home include:

- Separating work areas from living areas;
- Keeping family members out of the work area;
- Properly storing and disposing of toxic substances on farms and in cottage industries;
- Laundering contaminated clothing separately from family laundry when it is necessary to launder contaminated clothing at home;
- Informing workers of the risk to family members and of preventive measures.

Other preventive measures that need to be used include:

- Educating physicians and other health professionals to inquire about potential work-related causes of disease;
- Developing surveillance programs to track health effects that could be related to home contamination; and
- Educating children, parents, and teachers about the effects of toxic substances.

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