

# Work-Related Health



Immediate safety risks often overshadow health risks, though work-related illnesses kill 750–900 NZer's annually. Health issues accumulate over time, unlike injuries from single incidents.

## Awareness of hazards:

PCBUs and officers are required to understand all work-related (knowable) risks. Workers should be monitored for work-related health effects. Health risks accumulate over time – often undetected. Psycho-social (organisational) hazards include job demands and stressors, which impact upon wellbeing and contribute to physiological conditions. Unsafe work practices put physical stress on the body.

## Understanding risks:

Leading illnesses resulting from work activities include asbestosis, cancer, silicosis, and mesothelioma. Physical risks are back and soft tissue conditions, 'white knuckle' (vibrations), eye strain, and hearing loss.

## Eliminate or minimise risks (examples):

Risk controls focus on either the hazard or the behaviour of workers and others.

- **Eliminate the hazard.** Hazard monitoring (exposures) and worker monitoring (health effects).
- **Substitute the hazard.** PCBU adopts new and safer equipment or systems of work.
- **Isolate the hazard.** Isolation and exclusion zones.
- **Use engineered modifications.** Sensors, alarms, and proximity warnings. Ventilation, extraction and lighting systems.

Focusing on human behaviours include:

- **Administration** of safe systems of work. Annual leave and sickness provisions. Work/job design. Job rotation. Training and certification of high-risk work. Worker engagement. Dispute resolution.
- **Personal protection equipment (PPE).** PCBU provides PPE. Workers use correctly.

Fatigue (burnout) and stress are chronic conditions resulting from highly demanding work and sustained emotional arousal (fight, flight, freeze, or please). Stress causes medical conditions such as heart, blood, and intestinal conditions. Fatigue impairs a workers cognitive and physical performance.

Health conditions also present safety risks at work. Cognitive impairment means that a worker is distracted or inattentive, affecting decisions and judgement. Hearing or vision loss can also reduce sensory awareness of hazards, e.g., moving plant. Medical conditions can incapacitate a worker already working with risks. Physical conditions can reduce a worker's ability to avoid or escape danger.

Safe behaviour includes coming to work physically and mentally fit. In addition, safe behaviour includes taking regular breaks, two-man lifting, and using PPE correctly.