

WELDING FUME CAN BE FATAL

There are up to 80,000 welders in the UK, and every day they come into contact with welding fume. Whether welding is a full-time occupation, or just part of the job, it has been shown that welding fume can be harmful to health, and in 2019 the HSE reclassified welding fume as carcinogenic following research from the WHO.

Welding fume is created when metal is heated above its boiling point. Typically during electric welding with arc temperatures of more than 15,000°C. When it cools, the fume turns into airborne particles that can be inhaled.

Some welding fume is easy to see but much of it is invisible.

THE RISK

Studies have shown that full-time welders have a greater risk of lung cancer than those who have only welded occasionally. However, the risk increases in both groups with their length of employment.

The risks vary from industry to industry, and as one would expect, this depends on the type of work and materials.

For example, welders in shipbuilding, construction, machinery manufacturing, and the repair of transport equipment typically have a higher risk of lung cancer than welders in vehicle manufacturing.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

All businesses undertaking welding activities should ensure effective engineering controls are provided, and correctly used, to control fume arising from those welding activities.

Your employer has a duty of care to keep you safe at work, and you have rights to a safe work environment under health and safety regulations.

WELDING FUME CAN ALSO BE LINKED CANCER OF THE:

- ◆ Nasal septum
- ◆ Throat
- ◆ Stomach
- ◆ Bowel
- ◆ Kidney
- ◆ Liver
- ◆ Lung
- ◆ Bladder

Research shows that if you are a welder you are 44% more likely to develop lung cancer and 8 times more likely to develop early-onset Parkinson's disease.

NEXT STEPS

We want to see businesses impose better engineering controls and the proper respiratory protective equipment to protect their employees. If you feel your workplace is not up to code then you should demand your rights under health and safety regulation.

If you are in a union - then speak to them and ask for their help.

If you are experiencing symptoms or think you may have been exposed to a cancer-causing agent, it is important to speak with your doctor, especially if you are experiencing sore eyes or throat, or breathing problems.

