

# NELHSF NewsNotes

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## PROTECT YOUR FAMILY REDUCE CONTAMINANTS AT HOME

Workers can carry hazardous substances home from work on their clothes, bodies, tools, and other items. Workers can unknowingly expose their families to these substances, causing various health effects.



**REDUCE CONTAMINATION AT HOME**

## CONTAMINANTS

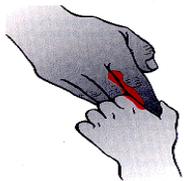
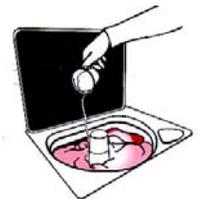
The National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducted a study regarding contaminants brought into the home by workers that caused health effects among workers' families. The study found reports of incidents in 36 states. Such incidents have resulted in a wide range of health effects among workers' families, including respiratory problems, neurologic disorders, and fatal poisonings. Contaminants that caused health effects among construction workers' families include:

- **Asbestos**  
Asbestos reaching workers' homes has occurred worldwide, resulting in all forms of asbestos disease among workers' family members, including over 100 identified deaths from mesothelioma in the United States. Although asbestos is now used less and regulated more, there is still the chance for exposure among workers' families, especially among construction workers.
- **Lead**  
Incidences of workers' family exposure to lead contamination were identified. More than half of the reports on workers' children have occurred since 1990.
- **Silica and caustic dusts**  
Silica and caustic dusts from lime and concrete can be brought home on clothes.
- **Asthmagens and allergens**  
Family members have had allergic reactions to allergens from dust and other materials.
- **Fibrous glass**  
Family members have developed irritated skin after their clothing was washed with an insulation worker's work clothes.
- **Beryllium**  
Cases of chronic beryllium disease were identified among workers' families.
- **Cadmium**  
Cadmium in the homes of workers resulted in increased levels in the workers' children.

## ROUTES OF EXPOSURE

The means by which hazardous substances have reached workers' homes and families include:

- **Work clothing**  
Cases involve beryllium, lead, pesticides, and other chemicals. In some cases washing machines and dryers contained dangerous levels of the materials, poisoning those laundering work clothes and contaminating other laundry.
- **Tools and equipment**  
Substances brought home on hand tools and other equipment have contaminated homes and vehicles. Cases involved mercury, pesticides, PCBs, and radioactive material.



- **Taking items home from work**  
Items such as bags, rags, metal drums, and scrap lumber have caused serious and fatal poisonings of family members.
- **The worker's body**  
Reports document cases where workers passed dangerous materials to their family members by their hands.
- **Family visits to the workplace**  
Family members can be exposed to dangerous materials in dust or air through visits to work areas.



## PREVENTION

### For exposed construction workers:

- use good safety practices to reduce exposure
- leave soiled clothes at work
- change clothes before leaving work
- store nonwork clothes away from work clothes
- shower before leaving work if possible
- do not take tools, scrap, packaging, and similar items home
- inform workers of potential exposure
- launder work clothes separately
- prevent family members from visiting the work area

## DECONTAMINATION

Prevention is best. Decontamination is difficult and may not be effective.

Results depend on the cleaning methods used, the material to be removed, and the surface to be cleaned. Soft materials such as carpet and clothing are the hardest to clean. Lead, asbestos, and beryllium are especially difficult to remove.

Normal housecleaning and laundry usually do not succeed. Sometimes, even the strongest decontamination methods fail. Decontamination may even increase the hazard to people in the home by stirring materials into the air.

### Decontamination procedures include:

- air showers
- laundering
- dry cleaning
- shampooing
- airing
- vacuuming
- other methods for cleaning surfaces



Source: U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)

(Printed in house)