# REVIEW OF WORKPLACE EXPOSURE STANDARDS/LIMITS FOR AIRBORNE CONTAMINANTS STATUS AT JUNE 2023

### Introduction

Safe Work Australia is undertaking a major review of workplace exposure standards (WES) for airborne contaminants. Most of the review is now completed and recommendations will soon be made to Work Health and Safety (WHS) Ministers to amend many of the WES, which will soon be referred to as workplace exposure limits (WELs).

However, work will soon commence on two further areas of consideration.

- Proposed WEL that have been identified as needing a regulatory impact assessment (RIA), due to significant concerns being raised by parts of industry.
- Contaminants that have been classified as non-threshold genotoxic carcinogens (NTGCs). Due to the nature of NTGCs, consideration is being given to restricting some or all use of them via an authorisation process, rather than applying a WEL.
  Consultation on the management of NTGCs has commenced with public comment closing on 8 September 2023

At the same time, Safe Work Australia has also undertaken consultation on the adoption of a workplace exposure standard for the diesel particulate matter of diesel engine emissions, and will soon commence work on assessing whether the exposure standard for welding should be reduced. Consideration is also being given to a further reduction in the WES for respirable crystalline silica.

In order to understand when and where these chemicals are utilised and the cost to industry of either a new WEL or an authorisation process, Safe Work Australia (and/or consultants working on their behalf) will be seeking input from organisations whose work involves these airborne contaminants. Ai Group, as a member of Safe Work Australia representing industry, will be helping to facilitate the necessary input. We need to hear from relevant organisations who supply, produce or use products that may result in the release of these contaminants. Please note, Safe Work Australia have commenced consultation on the NTGCs.

For further information, or to list your organisation as interested in one or more of these airborne contaminants, contact <u>Tracey Browne</u> on 0438 207 799

### **Chemicals for Regulatory Impact Assessment**

- Benzene
- Carbon dioxide
- Chlorine
- Copper (fumes)
- Copper (dusts and mists) (as CU)

#### Non-threshold genotoxic carcinogens (NTGCs)

- Acrylamide
- Acrylonitrile \*
- Allyl chloride
- Allyl glycidyl ether (AGE)
- Anisidine
- (o-, p- isomers)
- Benzidine #
- 1,3-Butadiene
- Catechol
- (bis) chloromethyl ether #
- beta-Chloroprene
- Chromium (VI) (as Cr) ^
- Chrysene
- Coal tar pitch volatiles (as benzene solubles)
- 1,2-Dibromo ethane
- 3,3'-Dichlorobenzidine \*

- Formaldehyde
- Hydrogen cyanide
- Hydrogen sulphide
- Nitrogen dioxide
- Titanium dioxide
- Diethyl sulfate \*
- Dimethyl Sulphate \*
- Dimethyl carbomoyl chloride
- Dinitrotoluene
- Ethylene dichloride
- Ethylene oxide
- Ethylenimine
- Hydrazine
- Lead chromate (as Cr)
- 4,4'-methylene bis(2-chloroaniline) \*
- 2-Nitrotoluene
- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH) mixture when containing benzo[a]pyrene
- Tetranitromethane
- Urethane
- Vinyl bromide
- Vinyl chloride, monomer \*

Chemicals marked with a # are already listed as prohibited carcinogens Chemicals marked with a \* are already listed as restricted carcinogens Chemicals marked with a ^ are already listed as restricted hazardous chemicals

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### **Diesel Particulate Matter**

In related work, Safe Work Australia is currently considering adoption of a workplace exposure standard (WES) for the diesel particulate matter (DPM) component of diesel engine emissions.

Members have previously been advised about a consultation process which closed on 4 June 2023.

The proposed WES for DPM is specified as the respirable elemental carbon (REC) content of the DPM. The proposed WES is an eight-hour time weighted average (TWA) of 15 micrograms of REC per cubic metre (i.e.  $15\mu$  REC/m<sup>3)</sup>.

Further information about the review, including access to a research report, can be found on the <u>SWA engage website</u>. We expect that submissions will be published on that page in the near future.

### Welding fumes

During the review process mentioned above, a recommendation was made to remove the WES for welding fumes and rely on the WES for individual airborne contaminants.

Safe Work Australia members did not agree to this recommendation and the current WES has been retained in the list of WES that will go to WHS Ministers for approval. Work is now commencing to consider whether the WES should be reduced. Ai Group will advise members of any consultation processes that are initiated by Safe Work Australia to inform decisions.

## **Respirable Crystalline Silica**

In December 2019 Work Health and Safety (WHS) ministers agreed by the requisite majority to reduce the workplace exposure standards (WES) for respirable crystalline silica to an eight hour time weighted (TWA) of 0.05 mg/m<sup>3</sup>. This was a reduction from 1.0 mg/m<sup>3</sup>.

All jurisdictions have since adopted this new WES.

Consideration is now being given to a further reduction in the WES, to either  $0.02 \text{ mg/m}^3$  or  $0.025 \text{ mg/m}^3$ . These options will be considered by WHS ministers in due course.