



How to identify airborne contaminants that can cause harm to agricultural workers

This checklist will help persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) in the agricultural industry to identify airborne contaminants that can cause harm to their workers.

Have you looked around your farm to identify potential hazards? For example, have you checked your shearing and machinery sheds, workshops, machinery, stockyards, and lunchrooms for any hazards?

Regularly looking at your workplace and observing how your workers conduct their work will help you to identify airborne contaminants such as dusts, gases, fumes, mists, or vapours.



Identification is the first step in managing work, health and safety (WHS) risks. If you identify a hazard by using the checklist below, you should do a [workplace risk assessment](#).



Look at your workplace

Yes No

Do your workers use machinery or equipment that exposes them to a hazard or risk? For example, harvesters that create dusts, mixing vats that make vapours, or generators that release fumes?

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Tools and equipment used on farms can create airborne contaminants.

Are your workers using materials or products that release dusts, gases, fumes, mists or vapours?

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Some materials and products used on farms release fine dust particles, vapours or fumes into the air that are not always visible.

Do you use hazardous chemicals?

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Inhaling dusts, fumes or vapours from herbicides, pesticides, adhesives and paints can damage the lungs.

Do you know if you or your workers are exposed to contaminated dusts and aerosols?

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Agricultural workers may be at risk of zoonotic diseases including Q-fever.

Do your workers carry out tasks inside or within an enclosed space?

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Working inside or in an enclosed space can mean there is less ventilation and airborne contaminants are more likely to be breathed in.

Can you see anything in the air, such as dust plumes, gases, or vapours? For example, when machinery is being used or when workers are carrying out tasks?

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If you can see substances in the air, such as dusts, they have the potential to be breathed in if your workers are unprotected.

Can you smell anything when you look around the farm?

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Not all hazards can be seen or smelled. Hazards like vapours and fumes can be invisible. If you can smell it though, you're also breathing it in.

Can you see coatings of dusts or residues on surfaces? For example, on machinery, equipment, windows or work surfaces.

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Looking at how clean surfaces are can help indicate the presence of airborne contaminants.

Are your workers covered in dusts while working?

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Exposure to dusts can cause irritation, allergies and even lung diseases. If workers are covered in dusts it could indicate that your work practices are not controlled, and their risk of exposure is higher. If so, it's important your workers stop work, identify the hazards and re-assess the task applying appropriate control measures.

Do certain work tasks make your workers cough? For example, when cleaning work sheds, working with pesticides or drenching livestock?

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If workers cough during specific tasks, it might mean that they are breathing in something that is harmful to their lungs. If so, it's important to stop work, identify the hazards and re-assess the task applying appropriate control measures.

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Talk and consult with your workers

Yes

No

When you consult with your workers, are they telling you that they see, smell, or feel the effects of airborne contaminants? Do they know the risks of breathing them in?

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Your workers may be able to tell you if their work produces dusts, gases, fumes, mists and vapours. You must then manage work processes to eliminate or reduce the risk of exposure.

Do you consult with your workers and listen to their concerns about their work processes to help you change how they conduct work to eliminate or minimise their exposure?

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As a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), you have a duty of care to ensure workers are not exposed to health and safety risks. Listening to your workers can provide valuable information about hazards and risks in the workplace which you can then manage appropriately.

Have you completed a risk assessment in consultation with workers and health and safety representatives (HSRs) to help identify the risks and controls required to reduce workplace exposure.

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Consultation with workers and HSRs is required at each step of the risk management process. By drawing on their knowledge and experience, you can identify hazards and choose effective control measures.



Check labels & safety data sheets

Yes

No

Have you checked the materials and products you work with for a label with health information? For example, health hazard information on chemicals used for fumigation and pest control?

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Labels can provide you with information about health hazards and safe ways of using the chemical.

Find out more at: swa.gov.au/topic/labelling-chemicals

Have you checked the materials and products you work with for safety data sheets, or product information sheets and do you understand the health and safety information in it?

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A safety data sheet, or product safety sheet, provides detailed information on a hazardous chemical or product. It is important to read and understand this information before directing any work with a hazardous chemical so that it can be safely stored, used or disposed of at the workplace.

Read our [Using safety data sheets: identifying hazards that can cause occupational lung diseases information sheet](#).

Are there workplace exposure limits for anything you use or generate at your workplace? For example, pesticides, carbon monoxide from generators or wood dust?

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Airborne contaminants like dusts, vapours, gases, mists and fumes may have a workplace exposure limit that must not be exceeded. Workplace exposure limits are the maximum level of an airborne contaminant that most (but not all) people can be exposed to without harm to their health.

PCBUs must aim to limit exposure to as low as reasonably practicable, even if they meet the workplace exposure limits. Specialist equipment or training by an occupational hygienist may be needed to determine the difference between safe levels of airborne contaminants and levels that are harmful to workers.



Contact your WHS regulator

Yes

No

Have you looked for guidance on your WHS regulator's website?

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Your [WHS regulator](#) is responsible for regulating and enforcing WHS laws in their jurisdiction. Contact them if you have any questions specific to your workplace.



For more information, read our factsheet '[How to identify airborne contaminants that can cause harm to agricultural workers](#)' at swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants.