



New workplace exposure limits are coming

Are you ready?

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1 Key messages

Here are some key messages you can share with your stakeholders or workers.

- In April 2024, Safe Work Australia announced that Commonwealth, state and territory work health and safety (WHS) ministers had agreed to new workplace exposure limits (WEL) for airborne contaminants.
- The new workplace exposure limits come into effect on 1 December 2026.
- Employers must continue to comply with the current workplace exposure standards for airborne contaminants (WES) list until the workplace exposure limits come into effect.
- As an employer, you should start preparing for the transition to the new workplace exposure limits by understanding your WHS duties, including when to undertake air and health monitoring, consult with workers, review safety data sheets, and when to engage an occupational hygienist.
- Visit Safe Work Australia's [Airborne Contaminants Hub](#) for resources and guidance to help you understand your WHS duties and prepare for the transition to the WEL on 1 December 2026.

[Click here](#) to download the social media assets

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Social media assets

Our 3 downloadable social media assets tell employers, WHS professionals and other technical experts, and workers, how they can find information to help them prepare for workplace exposure limits coming into effect on 1 December 2026.

Aimed at: Employers

Can be shared by: WHS professionals, technical experts, industry bodies

Workplace exposure limits are changing

Start to prepare now!

Undertake a risk assessment

Talk with your workers

Review safety data sheets

Seek additional help if required

Talk to your WHS regulator

Engage an occupational hygienist

WES WEL

swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants

Aimed at: WHS professionals and technical experts

Can be shared by: WHS regulators, unions, industry bodies

Are you a WHS practitioner or occupational hygienist?

Visit the airborne contaminants hub for a comparison of technical changes that will take effect from 1 December 2026.

WES WEL

Prepare for the transition today
1 December 2026
swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants

Aimed at: Workers

Can be shared by: Employers, unions, industry associations

Do you work with airborne contaminants?

You need to be ready for the change!

Under WHS laws, your employer must eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure.

WES WEL

Workplace exposure limits
1 December 2026
swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants



Aimed at: Employers

Can be shared by: WHS professionals, technical experts, industry bodies

Workplace exposure limits are changing



Start to prepare now!



Undertake a risk assessment



Talk with your workers



Review safety data sheets



Seek additional help if required



Talk to your WHS regulator



Engage an occupational hygienist



swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants



Click here to download this social media asset

2





Social media assets **Employers**

This social media tile is aimed at employers and can be shared by WHS professionals and technical experts, WHS regulators, unions, industry bodies and others.

Suggested caption:

On 1 December 2026, the workplace exposure standards (WES) for airborne contaminants will be replaced with workplace exposure limits (WEL).

As an employer, you need to be ready for the change! That means:

-  understanding your WHS duties, including how to eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure to airborne contaminants
-  talking with workers
-  revising safety data sheets
-  engaging an occupational hygienist if needed.

Get prepared – visit Safe Work Australia’s airborne contaminants hub:

www.swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants



Aimed at: WHS professionals and technical experts

Can be shared by: WHS regulators, unions, industry bodies



 [Click here](#) to download this social media asset

2 Social media assets **WHS professionals and technical experts**

This social media tile is aimed at WHS professionals and technical experts and can be shared by WHS regulators, unions, industry bodies and others.

Suggested caption:

Are you a work health and safety practitioner, or an occupational hygienist?

In addition to resources for employers and workers, Safe Work Australia’s airborne contaminants hub also has information aimed at occupational hygienists and other technical WHS practitioners who help businesses manage risks from airborne contaminants.

The hub includes a comparative document on the technical changes that will take effect from 1 December 2026 when workplace exposure limits (WEL) replace the workplace exposure standards (WES).

Visit the hub: www.swa.gov.au/airborne-contaminants



Aimed at: Workers

Can be shared by: Employers, unions, industry associations



 [Click here](#) to download this social media asset

2








Social media assets

Workers

This social media tile is aimed at workers in industries with work processes that create airborne contaminants and can be shared by employers, WHS regulators, unions, industry bodies and others.

Suggested caption:

Do you work in one of the following industries?

- Mining 
- Construction 
- Manufacturing 
- Agriculture 
- Transportation 
- Food processing 
- Laboratory research/Pharmaceuticals 

Work processes in these industries can create airborne contaminants (vapours, gases, mists, fumes and dusts), which can't always be smelled or seen to be present at levels harmful to your health.

Under WHS laws, your employer must eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure.

Find out more about your rights on Safe Work Australia's airborne contaminants hub: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/WEL-infographic-worker-rights



[Click here](#) to download the infographics

3 Infographics

Our infographics explain what airborne contaminants are and how they can harm health. They also explain what employers and workers can do to meet their WHS duties and prepare for the changes on 1 December 2026. These can be shared digitally or physically around your workplace.

Airborne contaminants can cause...

Eye irritation and damage

Damage to central and peripheral nervous systems

Heart disease

Lung disease

Liver damage

Kidney damage

Skin irritation and dermatitis

Cancer

Airborne contaminants can enter the body by being breathed in, through skin contact or by being swallowed.

Find out more on the Safe Work Australia website.

Employers must ensure that exposure to airborne contaminants is as low as possible so workers don't get sick.

What is an airborne contaminant?

Airborne contaminants include:

- dusts
- gases
- mists
- fumes
- vapours

They can be produced from processing materials such as wood and concrete, or be in fumes and vapour from welding, paint or glue.

Not all workplace hazards are visible.

Airborne contaminants may be invisible to the naked eye and have potential to cause serious harm.

Find out more on the Safe Work Australia website.

Apply the WHS risk management process to ensure you and your workers don't get sick from exposure to airborne contaminants.

Working safely around airborne contaminants

Your WHS rights and responsibilities at work

Work processes can release dusts, gases, fumes, vapours, or mists into the air. These are known as airborne contaminants, and they may pose a serious risk to your health and safety at work.

As a worker, you have the right to:

- be safe from exposure to airborne contaminants
- be consulted on health and safety matters related to airborne contaminants
- access information, training and instruction to do your job safely
- refuse unsafe work if there is a serious risk to health and safety from exposure to airborne contaminants

As a worker, your responsibilities include:

- taking reasonable care of your own health and safety
- ensuring your actions do not harm others
- following reasonable instruction, policy and procedures
- using equipment and any personal protective equipment correctly

Find out more about working safely around airborne contaminants

Top tips for employers to comply with workplace exposure limits

- 01. Use a risk management approach**
You must eliminate or minimise airborne contaminants in the workplace so far as is reasonably practicable.
- 02. Prioritise higher level controls**
You can eliminate the risk of airborne contaminants by removing the process or materials that are creating the hazardous substance in the first place.
- 03. Review safety data sheets (SDS)**
Reading, understanding and following the instructions and instructions in an SDS is important for using hazardous chemicals safely in the workplace.
- 04. Organise regular air monitoring**
You must conduct air monitoring if you are not certain if the concentration of a substance exceeds the limits, or if it's necessary to find out if there is a risk to health. Air monitoring should be conducted by a competent person, such as an occupational hygienist.
- 05. Ensure appropriate RPE/PPE is available if needed**
You must also provide training on using and maintaining personal and respiratory protective equipment and make sure your workers are using it correctly.

Employers must ensure that workers and others at the workplace are not exposed to levels of airborne contaminants above the workplace exposure limits.

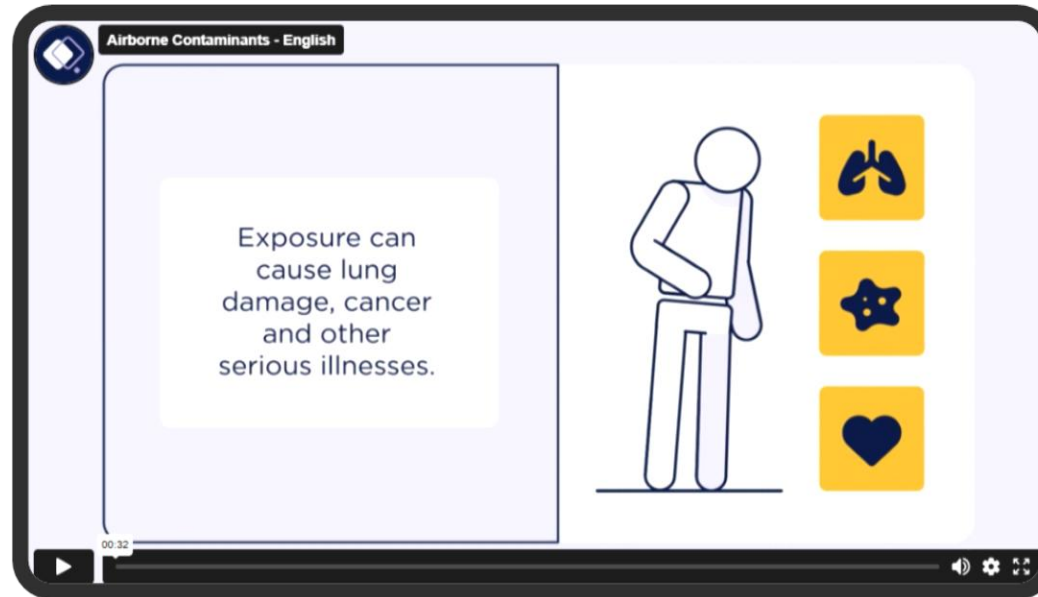
Find out more on the Safe Work Australia website.



[Click here to view the animations](#)

4 Video animations

Our series of 5 video animations are aimed at helping employers and workers understand what airborne contaminants are, how to identify them, and how to manage risks relating to them in the workplace. They can be shared on your social media channels and shared digitally with your workers and stakeholders.



[Click here for industry-specific resources](#)

5 Industry-specific resources

Airborne contaminants like herbicides, pesticides and hay dusts are common in the agricultural industry. Fine dust particles are common in the construction and manufacturing industries. We have several resources to support businesses in these industries protect their workers from harmful exposure to airborne contaminants, including practical checklists and case studies.

Checklist

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.

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

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?

1 Identification of 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

Do your workers use machinery or equipment that exposes them to a hazard or harvesters that create dusts, mixing vats that make vapours, or generators that make dusts? 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? Some materials and products used on farms release fine dust particles, vapours or fumes that are not always visible.

Do you use hazardous chemicals? Inhaling dusts, fumes or vapours from herbicides, pesticides, adhesives and paints can cause harm to workers.

Do you know if you or your workers are exposed to contaminated dusts and aerosols? Agricultural workers may be at risk of zoonotic diseases including Q-fever.

Do your workers carry out tasks inside or within an enclosed space? 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? If you can see substances in the air, such as dusts, they have the potential to be breathed in if unprotected.

Can you smell anything when you look around the farm? Not all hazards can be seen or smelled. Hazards like vapours and fumes can be invisible, but you're also breathing it in.

Checklist

How to manage the risks from airborne contaminants that can cause harm to manufacturing workers

The manufacturing industry uses products and materials that can release airborne contaminants such as dusts, gases, fumes, mists, and vapours into the air. These can cause harm to your workers.

Once you have done this, it is important to control the risks and take actions to eliminate or minimise them as much as you reasonably can. Use this checklist to help control the risks that cause harm to manufacturing workers.

As the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), you should observe your workplace to identify hazards and assess the risks.

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

Elimination Yes No

1 The most effective control measure is to eliminate the hazard and associated risk.

Can you completely remove airborne contaminants such as dusts, gases, fumes, mists and vapours from your workplace?

For example, can you remove materials or processes that generate airborne contaminants? It is not always possible to eliminate airborne contaminants at work. If this is the case, you must work through the hierarchy of control measures below.

Substitution Yes No

1 Substitution controls rely on replacing the hazard with something that is safer for your workers.

Can you replace materials with an option that is less hazardous?

For example, can you:

- use ingredients that are less dusty?
- use an alternative or modified work process or tool that doesn't generate as much dust?
- use products that have a stabiliser to minimise fumes and vapour production?
- replace high toxicity chemicals with lower toxicity chemicals?

Isolation Yes No

1 Isolation controls rely on physically separating the hazard or source of harm from workers by distance or using barriers.

Can you place barriers between a hazard and your workers?

For example, can you perform tasks that generate airborne contaminants in a fume cabinet or a room with local exhaust ventilation?

Checklist

How to identify airborne contaminants that cause harm to construction workers

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

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

When planning, and during the construction build or demolition, work environment to assess these may change during the project. This includes checking construction areas and lunchrooms.

1 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 you use machinery or equipment such as power tools that generate dusts or fumes? For example, do you use a lot of the tools and equipment used can create dusts or fumes when workers are working?

Do you use materials that release dusts or vapours when machined, applied, handled or cut? For example, do you use wood and concrete release fine dust particles or vapours into the air that are not always visible?

Do you use hazardous chemicals? Solvents, adhesives, paints, stains and varnishes can damage your lungs.

Do you know if you or your workers are exposed to asbestos? Asbestos is a hazardous material. Some activities that may disturb asbestos, such as sanding, may release fine dust particles that can become airborne and if inhaled, they may lead to illness.

Do you know if you or your workers are working in an enclosed space? Working in an enclosed space may mean there is less ventilation and airborne contaminants are more likely to be breathed in.

Do you know if you or your workers are exposed to dusts or vapours in the air, such as dust plumes or vapours when workers are cutting or grinding? For example, when welding?

Do you know if you or your workers are exposed to dusts or vapours in the air, such as dusts, they have the potential to be breathed in if unprotected.

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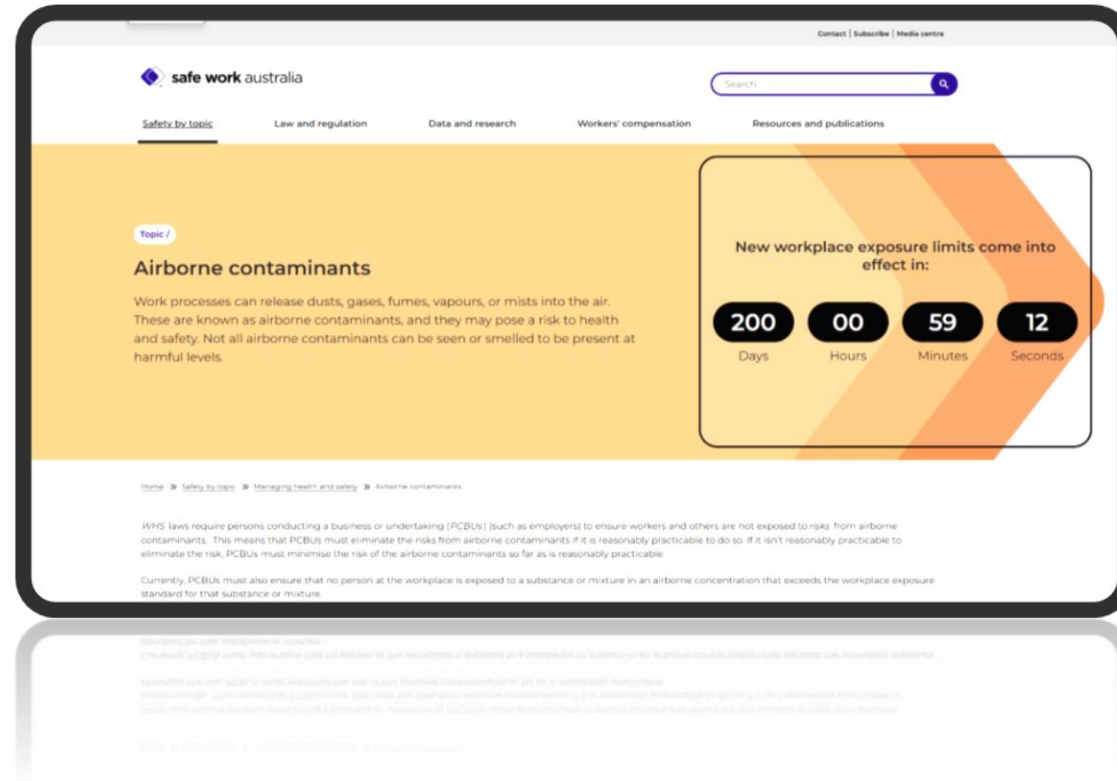
Do you know if you or your workers are exposed to dusts or vapours in the air, such as dusts, they have the potential to be breathed in if unprotected.



[Click here to view the hub](#)

6 Airborne contaminants hub

All the resources we have developed, and are currently working on, are published to our [airborne contaminants hub](#), a one-stop-shop with information to help employers, workers, WHS professionals, and governments and regulators.



7 Feedback



We welcome feedback on the resources we develop to help Australia transition to workplace exposure limits.

If you would like to share your thoughts on these resources, please contact us at:

chemicals@swa.gov.au

communication@swa.gov.au



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limits are coming**