

*JC McDonald et al, Occupational and Environmental Medicine (2000), Vol. 57 #12 p 823.*

A report of the results of 9 years of the SWORD programme for monitoring occupational lung disease in the UK.

Of cases of occupational asthma reported to SWORD:

9% were ascribed to flour or grain,  
4% to laboratory animal sources,  
4% to solder fume or colophony,  
6% to wood dust,  
3% to crustaceans or fish proteins,  
3% to latex,  
14% to isocyanates  
4% to glutaraldehyde  
3% to glues and resins



Occupational health practitioners and chest specialists report approximately 3000 cases of occupational asthma to SWORD each year.

Relative risks cannot be derived from this data as there are no accurate denominators.

One further weakness is that assignment of cause is usually based on the opinion of the diagnosing physician. Many physicians have no access to the workplace.

#### Comment

These are the main, known causes of occupational asthma in the UK. It would make some sense to try to ensure that all users or producers of these airborne substances are aware of the asthma risk and are guided as to risk management.

Where there are specific industries that use or produce these substances it would seem to make sense that they assist in the development of industry specific guidelines.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that many of these substances are not confined to specific industries, therefore risk management advice should be more task focussed.