

# **Work-Related Asthma in Washington State: A Review of Workers' Compensation Claims from 1995-2002**

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## **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report describes the frequency, incidence rate, cost, and industry distribution of work-related asthma in Washington State. For this report, work-related asthma includes both occupational asthma (asthma caused exclusively by exposures in the workplace) as well as work-aggravated asthma (pre-existing asthma worsened by workplace exposures).

A total of 1,377 claims for work-related asthma were received by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries from 1995-2002. Overall, 59% of claims were accepted; however, the percent of accepted claims varied considerably by industry.

There were 1,099 claims originating from the state fund. These claims incurred total workers' compensation costs of \$12 million and resulted in almost 79,000 lost workdays. Almost 10% of the workers' compensation costs were paid toward disability reimbursements for workers who developed permanent breathing problems.

Over the eight-year period, the rate of work-related asthma claims filed increased significantly from 7.9 to 12.9 claims per 100,000 full-time equivalent employees per year. The rate of accepted asthma claims increased slightly (the increase was not statistically significant), while the rate of compensable claims (i.e., those accepted for timeloss reimbursement and/or permanent partial disability payments) decreased.

The results from this analysis reveal that work-related asthma occurs in a very large number of industries and as a result of a diverse array of exposures. Nonetheless, several Washington risk classes were identified as priorities for prevention, including Sawmills, Plastic Products Manufacturing, Wood Products Manufacturing, Fiberglass Manufacturing, State Government (clerical), and Physician and Medical Clinics. In order to make a measurable impact on the morbidity of work-related asthma in Washington, multiple industries and hazards must be targeted for prevention.