



Health and Safety in Washington State's Collision Repair Industry: A Needs Assessment

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Executive Summary

Workers in the collision repair industry may be exposed to isocyanates and other harmful chemicals. Of particular concern is the burden of work-related asthma in this industry, which likely reflects exposures to the isocyanates in two-part paints. Consequently, Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) staff conducted key informant interviews, performed field investigations, and distributed a statewide needs assessment survey to gather information about:

- The collision repair industry business model,
- The number of collision repair production workers potentially exposed to isocyanates,
- Additional chemical and physical exposures of concern,
- Current health & safety practices in the industry, and
- Strategies to reduce exposure and increase employer and worker awareness.

The response rate to the survey was 69 percent, suggesting that our survey results are likely representative of Washington State's collision repair industry.

Our study found that collision repair in Washington State is a male-dominated industry comprised chiefly of small, non-unionized, family-run businesses. Many shops face numerous safety and health challenges, resulting from a combination of misinformation within the industry, insufficient funds to address workplace health & safety concerns, and social barriers to enforcing best practices within the shops. Most notably, inappropriate selection and use of respirators and gloves likely contribute significantly to isocyanate exposures. Collision repair workers are potentially exposed to a variety of additional chemical and physical hazards that deserve attention. We determined that this industry is a good candidate for a "research to practice" intervention comprised of both an educational campaign and technical assistance. However, any such intervention must account for the financial, demographic, and social characteristics of this industry.