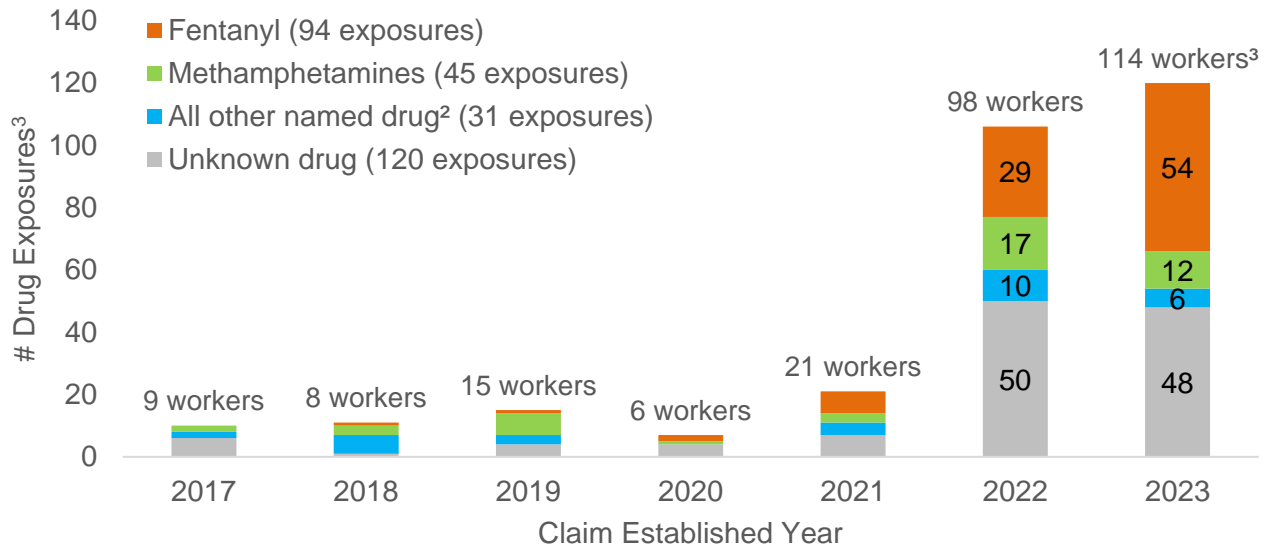


**Unintentional occupational exposure to illicit drugs increased strikingly in 2022**

Washington State Workers' Compensation Data, 2017–2023<sup>1</sup>



**There was a five-fold increase in workers' compensation claims for inhalation exposure to illicit drugs in the workplace between 2021 and the period 2022-2023.**

- Between 2017 and 2023, 271 workers filed claims for accidental illicit drug exposures. Fifteen workers reported being exposed to more than one drug.
- A variety of occupations are at risk during routine job duties: 72% of exposed workers were in occupations outside of police and security guards, such as public transit operators (44 claims), social service workers (37 claims), and maintenance and janitorial staff (33 claims). Other exposed occupations include healthcare, retail, and office workers. Common locations for exposure were public restrooms (62 claims) and buses (39 claims).
- The drug(s) named in the claim is based on the perceptions and information available to the exposed worker. The name of the illicit drug was unknown in 41% of cases. Fentanyl and methamphetamines were the most commonly specified illicit drugs. Reports of fentanyl exposure increased from 7 claims in 2021 to 54 claims in 2023.
- As public awareness of fentanyl and illicit drugs increases, workers may be more likely to seek medical care for exposure to suspicious smoke. Claims were accepted 32% of the time. While no long-term symptoms or time loss was reported, exposure can be a source of occupational stress.

1. Workers' compensation claims were filed for potential or confirmed inhalation exposure to an illicit drug in the workplace, which may or may not have resulted in symptoms or disease. For information on the methods of the toxic inhalation surveillance system, see [SHARP's Toxic Inhalation Surveillance Program](#), technical report # [64-30-2021](#). Case counts from 2023 are subject to increase as more claims are coded for OIICS.

2. Other drug exposures included heroin (N=14), cannabis (N=11), synthetic cannabinoids (N=3), PCP (N=1), unspecified opioids (N=1), and unspecified amphetamines (N=1). Washington State legalized the possession and private use of cannabis in 2012. However, cannabis use in public is illegal.

3. Workers can report more than one drug exposure per claim. In 2017-2023, there was a total of 271 claimants and 290 reported drug exposures.