By the Numbers – Lead Exposure



DID YOU KNOW?

The numbers align with OSHA's estimate that 804,000 workers in general industry and an additional 838,000 workers in construction are potentially exposed to lead. OSHA requires employers to protect their workers under standards covering general industry (1910.1025), shipyards (1915.1025) and construction (1926.62). The standards establish a permissible exposure limit of 50 µg/m3 of lead over an 8-hour, time-weighted average for all employees covered. In addition, OSHA established an action level of 30 µg/m3, which marks the level at which employers must initiate certain compliance actions.

In fact, it is often deadly: Around the world, a worker dies from toxic exposure in their workplace every 30 seconds, according to a 2018 UN report published in September by Baskut Tuncak, the United Nations special rapporteur on toxics. Every 15 seconds, a worker dies from dangerous working conditions in general.

In total, around 2.8 million workers globally die from unsafe or unhealthy work conditions per year, according to the report. And diseases resulting from workplaces—like lung cancer linked to inhaling carcinogenic substances on the job—account for around 86% of all premature death.

"In my view, much of what I describe in the report is criminal conduct," Tuncak said in his address to the Human Rights Council.

Cancer is by far the biggest contributor to those deaths, making up roughly 70% of workplace diseases. "Almost all such cancers can be prevented," the report reads.

"More than 200 different known factors, including toxic chemicals and radiation, have been identified to date as known or probable human carcinogens, and workers are exposed to many of these in the course of their jobs," the UN report reads. "Debilitating and fatal lung diseases, neurological disabilities, and…