

The Dangers of Wood Dust

Compiled from "Is it Safe" by the Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union, National Safety Construction Division (1993)

Wood dust is produced when timber is being worked such as in chipping, sawing, turning, drilling and sanding. Sanding is by far the most dangerous as the particles are so fine that a lot of masks do not entirely filter the particles, and, as a result, pass into our nasal cavities, sinuses and lungs.

Hardwoods in general such as beech, oak and mahogany and native hardwoods (eucalypts) generate fine particles of dust and this has a prime link with nasal cancers.

Softwood timbers from coniferous trees such as pine, are less of a risk.

Medium density fibreboard (MDF) poses another problem due to the bonding agent and should be treated the same as hardwood. A properly designed and maintained exhaust system is the best method of collecting the dust and is the ideal way.

However if this is not practical, dust respirators should be used whenever you are exposed to dust, not only when you are actually processing your work. The following list of some timbers and the effects that they might have should be kept in the workshop.

NAME	POSSIBLE HEALTH HAZARD
Alpine Ash <i>Eucalyptus delegatensis</i>	Irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
Blackbean <i>Castanospermum australe</i>	Irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
Blackwood <i>Acacia melanoxylon</i>	Dermatitis, asthma, irritation of nose & throat
Coolibah <i>Eucalyptus microtheca</i>	Dermatitis
Crows Ash <i>Flindersia australis</i>	Dermatitis
Douglas Fir (Oregon) <i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Dermatitis, nasal cancer, irritation to eyes & throat
Ebony <i>Diospyros</i> spp.	Irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
European Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Nasal cancer, dermatitis

European Boxwood <i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	Irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
European Walnut <i>Juglans regia</i>	Nasal cancer, irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
European Elm <i>Ulmus</i> spp.	Nasal cancer, irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
Grey Box <i>Eucalyptus microcarpa</i>	Eczema, irritation to nose & throat
Jarrah <i>Eucalyptus marginata</i>	Irritation to nose & throat
Meranti <i>Shorea</i> spp.	Irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
Messmate <i>Eucalyptus obliqua</i>	Asthma, irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis
Miva Mahogany <i>Dysoxylum muelleri</i>	Congested lungs, irritation to nose, eyes & throat, dermatitis headache, nose bleeding & loss of appetite
Mountain Ash <i>Eucalyptus regnans</i>	Irritation to nose, eyes & throat
Mulga <i>Acacia aneura</i>	Headaches, irritation to nose eyes & throat, vomiting
Port Orford Cedar <i>Chamaecyparis lawsoniana</i>	Dermatitis, violent ear ache giddiness, stomach cramps, bronchitis, irritation of mucous membranes
Redwood <i>Sequoia sempervirens</i>	Dermatitis & asthma
Rimu <i>Dacrydium cupressinum</i>	Irritation to eyes & nose
South American Cedar <i>Cedrela</i> spp.	Dermatitis, asthma, nasal cancer, irritation to nose & throat. Sap may cause blistering of skin and inflammation of eyelids
Spotted Gum <i>Eucalyptus maculata</i>	Dermatitis
Teak <i>Tectona grandis</i>	Dermatitis, conjunctivitis, oversensitivity to light, swelling of the scrotum, irritation to nose & throat, nausea
Western Red Cedar <i>Thuja plicata</i>	Asthma, dermatitis, nasal cancer, nausea, rhinitis, nosebleeding, giddiness, stomach pain

White Cedar
Melia azedarach

Dermatitis

White Baltic
Picea abies

Asthma, skin irritation

White Cypress Pine
Callitris glauca

Dermatitis, swelling eyelids, asthma, irritation of nose & throat, nasal cancer, furunculosis

Yellow Gum
Eucalyptus
leucoxylon

Irritation of nose & throat