

# Strategic Plan for Addressing Work-Related Asthma in Minnesota

*Recommendations of the Work-Related Asthma Advisory Workgroup*

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## Background

In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that Work-Related Asthma (WRA) be incorporated into the Commissioner's Asthma Advisory Work Group document "A Strategic Plan for Addressing Asthma in Minnesota" from 2002 and into the current Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Asthma Program activities. Therefore, in September 2005, MDH convened and facilitated an external advisory workgroup. This workgroup came together for five meetings over seven months to discuss WRA in Minnesota, to develop a strategic plan, and to make recommendations.

## Recommendations from the Minnesota Advisory Workgroup

The workgroup identified three overarching goals:

- Increase awareness about WRA and about identifying and documenting WRA
- Improve information on WRA in Minnesota to tailor interventions
- Reduce exposures to asthmagens

MDH will work with the WRA Advisory Workgroup members and partner with local organizations to achieve the goals identified by this workgroup.

## Asthma

Asthma is a chronic disease that causes tightening of the muscles surrounding the airways, swelling of the small airways (bronchioles), and over production of sticky mucus in the airways. There are many things (called 'triggers') that may activate asthma

symptoms or an asthma attack include allergens, emotional responses, irritants, and physical changes.

## Work-Related Asthma (WRA)

"Work-Related Asthma (WRA) is asthma that is either caused or made worse by an exposure in the workplace," (DHHS, 2004). Two categories under WRA identified by CDC (1999) are:

1. 'New-onset asthma,' which is asthma induced from workplace exposure to sensitizers and/or irritants
2. 'Work-aggravated asthma,' which is pre-existent asthma worsened by workplace exposures

## Nationally

- Approximately 15% of adult asthma is attributable to occupational factors (American Thoracic Society, 2003).
- WRA costs approximately \$1.6 billion (direct and indirect) annually (Leigh JP, Romano PS et al., 2002).
- Approximately 350 agents are associated with WRA.

## Minnesota

In 2005, 11.8% of Minnesota adults (444,049 people) have ever been told by a doctor they have asthma (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005). Given the American Thoracic Society estimate of 15%, potentially 66,600 Minnesota adults have asthma that is attributable to occupational factors.

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### Minnesota Advisory Workgroup

The Work-Related Asthma Advisory Workgroup was charged with assessing the issues, determining the priorities, and making recommendations to deal with WRA including strategies to support asthma self-management and minimize exposures in the work environment.

The members of the Work-Related Asthma Advisory Workgroup are:

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### For More Information

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The strategic plan may be found on the MDH Asthma Program Web site at: [www.health.state.mn.us/asthma](http://www.health.state.mn.us/asthma).

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