Wood Dust – It’s Not Just a Nuisance Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Employees working with wood are at risk from breathing in fine particles of wood dust. Inhaling dust at work can cause lung damage and over time may develop into respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and occupational asthmas.
2. Settled dust contains the fine particles that are most likely to damage the lungs. Hardwoods, such as oak, western red cedar and iroko are carcinogens and can cause sinonasal cancer.
3. Cutting processes and how aggressive the machine blade profile is, as well as the type of wood, soft or hardwood, will determine the type of wood dust produced.
4. Wood dust may be explosive if part of a cloud of wood dust ignites and flame spreads through the rest of the cloud. Not all flammable dusts are equally explosive, and the extent of the explosion will vary.
5. Factors affecting explosion severity:

   - Type and concentration of wood dust
   - Particle size distribution
   - Moisture
   - Size of the source of ignition
   - Strength of the enclosure

STATS

- 10 studies found a significantly increased risk of lung cancer with wood dust exposure; those who were exposed to wood dust were at least 20% more likely to develop the disease, and those who worked in wood dust-associated occupations had a 15% greater risk.

- Another study out of Canada found the risk of lung cancer related to wood dust exposure was increased by approximately around 40%.
- According to WorkSafe, said diseases associated with wood dust and welding fumes included cancers, asthma and chronic lung conditions, that occupational exposures to chemicals and other substances are responsible for up to 27% of lung cancers in men.