

ALERT

Find out more... visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org

ASTHMA AT WORK by Susan Blonshine, RRT, RPFT, FAARC, BS, AE-C

In 2003, a man in his mid-40s developed an acute asthmatic attack at work and died. This individual worked as the manager at a small auto aftermarket facility that did detailing, rust proofing and spray-on truck bed liners. He was the only employee who applied the spray-on truck bed lining material. On that day, he sent his co-worker out of the area while he sprayed-on the truck bed liner. When the co-worker returned 20 minutes later, he found the work completed, the equipment turned off, and the manager gasping for breath on his knees outside the building, the mask that supplied fresh air hanging around his neck. In spite of quick emergency medical care, he was pronounced dead within the next hour. After he died, his coworkers mentioned that the manager had difficulty breathing after previous spray-on liner applications. In the past, he was treated at an emergency medical facility for shortness of breath symptoms and told the medical staff that two days prior he had applied the spray-on truck bed liner. He was not given instruction by the medical staff to avoid exposure to the chemicals or to quit working with the spray-on bed liner.

Fortunately, death from asthma is infrequent. Of the 86,000-87,000 people who die each year in Michigan, about 150 are caused by asthma. Despite their relatively rare occurrences, deaths from asthma are tragedies made more distressing because they are preventable.

To prevent future work-related asthma symptoms and deaths, a half-day training session for companies that use asthma sensitizers is available from Michigan State University. There are over 400 known causes of workplace asthma. Employees may be exposed to substances like metal working fluids (coolants), welding fumes and isocyanates in manufacturing industries, cleaning agents in service industries, animal-based material (dander, urine) in laboratories and agriculture, or plant-based material, such as flour dust, in bakeries. The training provides company health and safety personnel information about:

- ▶ what asthma is, and the worker's (patient's) role in preventing/controlling asthma
- ▶ the burden of asthma, especially in Michigan
- ▶ how work can cause new asthma or aggravate existing asthma
- ▶ how a Safety and Health program can develop a system to identify, control and prevent asthma in the workplace-- especially by instituting a medical surveillance program to monitor workers for breathing symptoms
- ▶ the costs (and savings) from having such a program
- ▶ where to find more information

Asthma symptoms and deaths can be prevented through workplace surveillance, education and proper medical care. If the employer and/or employees from the facility mentioned above had attended the training, that individual might still be alive. He may

have learned that the material he was working with caused asthma, and that repeated exposure would at the minimum make his asthma worse and was potentially life-threatening. Worksites now have another resource to prevent an asthma tragedy. Call 517-353-4979 to set up a training session at your worksite.

Susan Blonshine is the President of TechEd Consultants, which provides services to improve disease management through education, testing, research, and development.

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\$ Asthma disability costs three times more than other disabilities¹

\$ Annual per capita costs for employers of a worker with asthma estimated at \$5,385¹

\$ Annual costs of work related asthma in the U.S. are estimated at \$1.1-2.1 billion²

Sources:

1. Birnbaum HG, Berger WE et al. Direct and Indirect Costs of Asthma to an Employer. *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, 2002; 109(2):264-270.

2. Leigh JP, Romano PS, Schenker MC, Kreiss K. Costs of Occupational COPD and Asthma. *Chest*, 2002; 121:264-272.



ASTHMA COALITION COLUMN



Michigan Asthma Resource Kits: Making a Difference

One year ago, all 14 asthma coalitions started distributing Michigan Asthma Resource Kits (MARKs) to medical practices in their communities. To date, they have presented kits to almost 900 practices across the state.

The coalitions report that the kits have been very well-received, and have also helped them increase awareness about their coalition and state asthma activities. Additionally, the kits have given them an entree into venues they previously had difficulty accessing.

"The kits are getting us in the door, and after the physician and staff see them, they often ask us back to give additional training, especially on devices and spirometry," said Karen Meyerson, manager of the Pediatric and Adult Asthma Network of West Michigan. "I know of practices who have really changed the way they treat asthmatics."

MSU's Institute for Health Care Studies has been assisting with evaluation of the kits over the last year. Surveys from practices who have received kits thus far have shown that the asthma goals, patient handouts, pocket guides and asthma action plans are the most helpful pieces in the kit. The asthma resources list and diagnosis/patient assessment tools are also frequently cited as useful.

Coalitions are continuing to distribute MARKs. Find the MARK online at: GetAsthmaHelp.com/MARK%20main.asp

To find a coalition near you, visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org and click on Coalitions, or call toll free 866-395-8647.



Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

MI Asthma Communication Network
c/o American Lung Assoc. of Michigan
403 Seymour Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933-1179
phone: 1-866-395-8647
e-mail: info@GetAsthmaHelp.org

SPRING ASTHMA TIP: Camp ready kids

Many parents are starting to plan summer camps for their kids. To make sure your child's asthma doesn't interfere with his/her fun, keep the following tips in mind:

- ✓ Find out who is responsible for medical care at the camp. If an overnight camp, will a medically trained person be there 24 hours a day?
- ✓ On or before the first day of camp, set up a meeting with the person responsible for medical care and your child's counselor. Make sure they know what to do to help your child prevent and treat symptoms. Provide a written Asthma Action Plan to support what you discuss at the meeting.
- ✓ Make sure you send enough medication to get your child through the day or session- be sure to check expiration dates.
- ✓ Ask where the meds are kept at camp- will your child be able to carry their rescue inhaler? Will they be able to get to it quickly if not?
- ✓ Check in with the camp's medical staff to see how your child is doing at camp. Has your child had symptoms? Are they following the Asthma Action Plan?



Visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org or call 866-395-8647 for more information about asthma events & trainings in your area.

MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

April

- 13 **Asthma Education Conference- health professional education**
Gilmore Center for Health Education (at Bronson Hospital), Kalamazoo, 3 to 8:30 p.m., For more info: 269-373-5025
- 19 **Is Your Asthma Under Control? - community event**
Munson Community Health Ctr., Traverse City 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., For more info: 231-935-6371
- 26 **Summit of Michigan Asthma Coalitions - coalition event**
Henry Center for Executive Development, Lansing, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., For more info: 517-484-7206 or toll free, 866-395-8647
- 28 **Living with Asthma Night - Triggers & More - community event**
Flint Public Library, Flint, 6 to 8 p.m., For more info: 810-232-3541
- 28 **Obesity and Asthma - health professional education**
Traverse City Golf & Country Club, Traverse City, 5:30 to 8 p.m., For more info: 231-935-6546

May

- 3 **World Asthma Day - community event**
Flint U of M, W.S. White building lobby, Flint, free asthma screenings, activities, 3 to 6 p.m., For more information: 810-257-9591



Support the American Lung Association of Michigan in May. To find a Blow the Whistle on Asthma Walk near you, call 1-800-LUNG USA