Ontario Cancer Facts

April 2012
(Special edition)

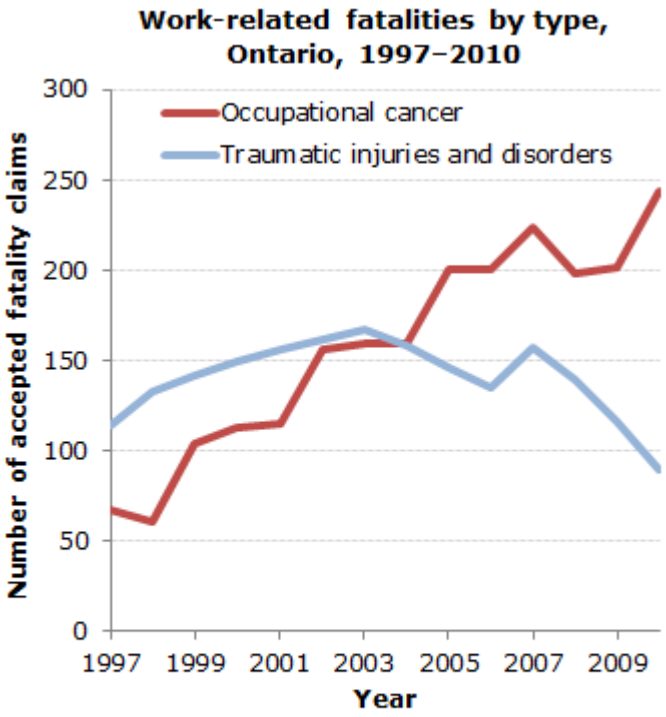
Occupational cancer is the leading cause of work-related fatalities in Ontario

Occupational cancer occurs as a result of exposure to workplace carcinogens. These exposures may have occurred as many as 30 years prior to cancer onset. Workers who are no longer directly exposed to carcinogens continue to be at risk.[1]

In Ontario, occupational cancer accounted for 63% of all accepted work-related fatality claims in 2010, far surpassing the percentage of traumatic injuries and disorders (i.e., fatal burns and amputations), which reached around 23%. Traumatic injuries and disorders had historically accounted for the majority of accepted work-related fatality compensation claims, making up approximately 51% in 1997 compared with approximately 30% of accepted occupational cancer claims that same year.

The number of accepted occupational cancer fatality claims has continued to increase over the years, from 160 in 2004 to 244 in 2010. Accepted fatality claims resulting from traumatic injuries and disorders have decreased from 158 in 2004 to 89 in 2010.

Several reasons exist for changes in the rate of acceptance of claims over time, such as changes in adjudication policies,[2,3] changes in the awareness of the eligibility criteria for claims and/or the association between exposure to workplace carcinogens and occupational cancer.[4,5] These factors may be part of the reason for the increased number of accepted claims over time.



Source: Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) National Work Injury, Disease and Fatality Statistics 1997–2010.

- The trends for accepted work-related fatality claims have changed.
- Occupational cancers need to be better reported.
- Occupational cancers can be prevented by enforcing more stringent occupational exposure limits and increasing efforts towards toxic use reduction.

Accepted occupational cancer claims represent only a small fraction of the actual number of work-related cancers. This is thought to be primarily the result of under-reporting,[4,5] and especially for mesothelioma, not filing a claim.[4] The actual number of occupational cancers is therefore grossly under-represented by accepted claims statistics.[6]

From 1997 until 2010, approximately 71% of all accepted occupational cancer fatality claims were the direct result of exposure to asbestos.[7,8] Of these deaths, approximately 93% were caused by lung cancer or mesothelioma — a rare type of cancer that affects the protective lining of many internal organs.

More workers in Ontario than in any other province are exposed to asbestos.[9] Ontario industries with the highest accepted occupational cancer fatality claims for the period between 1997 and 2010 include construction and manufacturing, both of which have a history of heavy asbestos use.

Ontario's compensated occupational cancer claims are the most costly to the system,[10] so the prevention of these cancers is a priority that will not only save the lives of workers, but also health care funds. To change these trends, it is important to further strengthen and enforce occupational exposure limits, and reduce the use of both known and suspected carcinogens and other toxic substances.

April 28 is the National Day of Mourning, which remembers workers who have been injured or who have died in the workplace. The Occupational Cancer Research Centre (OCRC) is dedicated to preventing work-related cancer through the identification and elimination of exposures to workplace carcinogens. Participate in declaring April 28th as a Day of Mourning and strive to prevent workplace deaths, illnesses, and injuries.[11]

See the report on accepted workplace fatality claims within Ontario and Canada, available from http://occupationalcancer.ca/2012/the-examination-of-accepted-workplace-fatality-claims-within-ontario-and-canada/?gwcpp_catid=5.

Any interpretations made from the data provided by the AWCBC are from the Occupational Cancer Research Centre and do not necessarily reflect the views of the AWCBC or any of its member Boards or Commissions.

References

1. Driscoll T, Steenland K, Pruss-Ustun A, et al. Occupational carcinogens: Assessing the environmental burden of disease at national and local levels. Geneva: World Health Organization (WHO), 2004.
2. Pichora EC, Payne JI. Trends and characteristics of compensated occupational cancer in Ontario, Canada, 1937–2003. Am J Ind Med 2007;50:980–91.
3. Lippel K. Workers' compensation for asbestos related disease in five Canadian provinces. Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, 2010. Available from: http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/resources-publications/ listed under Primary Prevention (Environmental and Occupational Exposures).
4. Kirkham TL, Koehoorn MW, McLeod CB, Demers PA. Surveillance of mesothelioma and workers' compensation in British Columbia, Canada. Occup Environ Med 2011;68:30–5.
5. Payne JI, Pichora E. Filing for workers' compensation among Ontario cases of mesothelioma. Can Respir J 2009;16(5):148–52.
6. Occupational Cancer Research Centre. Research Day 2011: The Burden of Occupational Cancer. Available from: http://occupationalcancer.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Burden-Backgrounder-Final.pdf.
7. Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC). National Work Injury Statistics Program (NWISP). 1997 – 2010 data years, extracted March 12, 2012.
8. Sharpe A, Hardt, J. Five Deaths a Day: Workplace Fatalities in Canada, 1993 – 2005. Centre for the Study of Living Standards [March 26, 2012]. Available from: http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2006-04.pdf.
9. Carex Canada. Occupational Exposure Estimates: Asbestos 2011a [February 13, 2012]. Available from: http://www.carexcanada.ca/en/asbestos/occupational_exposure_estimates/phase_2/.
10. Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). Report on occupational disease cost study. Actuarial Services Division, August 2007.
11. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. National Day of Mourning – April 28. Available from: http://www.ccohs.ca/events/mourning/.

To receive Ontario Cancer Facts by email, go to http://www.cancercare.on.ca/newsletter/One.aspx?objectId=100303&contextId=668&action=subscribe, provide email address and check the box for the 'Ontario Cancer Facts' Newsletter box.

This Ontario Cancer Fact was prepared by staff in the Occupational Cancer Research Centre in Prevention and Cancer Control.

Ontario
Cancer Care Ontario
Action Cancer Ontario

www.cancercare.on.ca
Email: cancerfacts@cancercare.on.ca