

Welding fume – a serious danger to your health

Welding fume can cause a toxic haze in the workplace. Analysis shows that this can have serious health consequences not only for welders themselves, but also for other workers.

+ Occupational asthma

Welders and other workers need to be especially careful around stainless steel fume as this contains chromium oxide (CrO₃) and nickel oxide, chemicals which can cause serious asthma.

+ Metal fume fever

Welders and other people working nearby can get what's known as metal fume fever, experiencing flu-like symptoms. This condition is usually associated with inhaling zinc, copper or magnesium fume.

+ Irritation of lungs and throat

The gases and fine particles found in welding fume can cause a dry, tickly throat, coughing, and a feeling of tightness in the chest. In some extreme cases fluid might build up the lungs, causing a pulmonary oedema.

+ Impaired lung function

Prolonged exposure to welding fume impairs general lung capacity. Symptoms often worsen over the course of the week, improving as soon as the worker is no longer exposed to welding fume.

+ Lung cancer

Exposure to welding fume carries a higher risk of developing lung cancer than asbestos exposure or smoking.

+ Inflammation of the lungs

Welders and other people working nearby are especially prone to lung infections. The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that between 40 and 50 people need hospital treatment every year in the UK because they have inhaled metal fume at work.