

Exposure to welding fume in Australian workplaces

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Respondent Profile



9 welders and boilermakers
7 company/industry reps
4 union reps
1 regulator

Experience ranging from apprentice boilermaker to those with 40+ years in industry

It was generally agreed that the level of **awareness** of welding fume harm had increased in recent years, but that there were still many who lacked awareness:

"I think there's a general acknowledgement that welding fumes aren't good, and that's sort of logical, 'it's smoke... you know, it can't be good for you,' but it's not much more than that" (Union Rep 1)

Employers' awareness of the hazards of exposure was also an issue – some employers were less likely to be aware, and some, while aware, may not accept their **responsibility** to minimise harms:

"Maybe it's not that people don't understand; it's maybe that there's not enough understanding by employers that they have that responsibility to make that sort of stuff happen" (Industry Rep 3)

The level of **concern around welding fume harms** was thought to vary among workers, and awareness did not always translate into concern:

"In my opinion, I'd say some are concerned about it, and others honestly couldn't give a rat's. They just don't seem to care about their own health and safety from some reason regarding respiratory health" (Worker 7)

There was thought to be a wider **work culture issue** at play, and workers' voices might not be strong enough to counteract this culture:

"We do have to change industry's culture to the current acceptance of the way that workers have been exposed to welding fumes" (Union Rep 1)

"I think a lot of people are too worried about speaking up because they're afraid to lose their job" (Worker 8)

In general, current control of exposure to welding fume was thought to be **poor**, and in particular **ventilation** was found to be very **poorly used**:

"I think there's a huge quantity of people who aren't being protected by welding fume as it stands today" (Industry Rep 1)

"[Ventilation] is non-existent" (Worker 5)

Major barriers to use of controls were **cost**, as well as the **knowledge and attitudes of employers** and business owners:

"I think you've got an employer that is a barrier in a lot of workplaces... I think it does come down to an employer being on board to start with" (Union Rep 3)

There was general agreement that any **intervention** to increase awareness of harms and control measure use would need to present a **clear, consistent, and straightforward** message that was **tailored to the target audience**. Many mentioned the need for a **wider cultural change** and discussed the need for any intervention to be **multifaceted**.

"I don't think it's going to be one strategy. I think it has to be multifaceted" (Union Rep 3)

Potential components of an intervention included **visual aids** and **clear guidance on control use**, delivered via **social media**, **industry bodies**, **safety meetings**, and/or **workplace posters**.

