

Howard Talks Tech

Take Home Contamination

Workers can carry hazardous substances home from work on their clothes, bodies, tools, and other items. A USA TODAY investigation found that employees in more than 35 states have unwittingly transported toxins away from work sites — potentially exposing many family members to contaminants; such as mercury, radioactive material, beryllium, lead, and asbestos, PCBs, pesticides and arsenic. Although most family members never develop medical problems or come into contact with the contaminants, others have died or now cope with lifelong health problems and fatal illnesses. Children often are in the most danger because of their developing organs and higher metabolic rates. The means by which hazardous substances have reached workers' homes and families include:



- **On Work clothing** - Cases involve beryllium, lead, pesticides, and other chemicals. In some cases washing machines and dryers contained dangerous levels of the materials, poisoning those laundering work clothes and contaminating other laundry.
- **On Tools and equipment** - Substances brought home on hand tools and other equipment have contaminated homes and vehicles. Cases involved mercury, pesticides, PCBs, and radioactive material.
- **Taking items home from work** - Items such as bags, rags, metal drums, and scrap lumber have caused serious and fatal poisonings of family members.
- **On The worker's body** - Reports document that workers passed dangerous materials to their family by their hands and hair.

Toxins transported off-site often are too small to be noticed, so relatives may never know they've been put at risk. They may be exposed if they touch a contaminated worker, handle his clothing or clean a house that contains hazards tracked in from the job. Hazards can get into the home when workers or employers fail to follow or provide proper safety protocols, such as showers or protective clothing.

Preventing take home toxins

- Use good safety practices to reduce exposure, wear all required PPE;
- Leave soiled clothes at work, best if employer arranges for laundering;
- Change clothes before leaving work;
- Store non-work clothes away from work clothes, in a separate locker when possible;
- Shower before leaving work, at least wash hands arms and face;
- Do not take tools, scrap, packaging, and similar items home;
- Inform workers of potential workplace toxins;
- Launder work clothes separately if they must be home laundered; and
- Prevent family members from visiting hazardous material work areas.

These talks are distributed with the hope that they spark some dialog. Feel free to use them as the basis for a tool box talk with your colleagues, clients, safety committee members or employees.