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HYGIENIC ASSESSMENT OF INDUSTRIAL DUST IN MECHANICAL WORKSHOPS AND ITS IMPACT ON WORKERS' HEALTH

Iskandarov A.B., Iskandarova G.T., Abdullayeva M.B., Yusupova D.Y.

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Abstract: Background: Mechanical operations such as grinding, cutting and polishing can generate heterogeneous airborne particles with potential respiratory consequences. Objective: To synthesize evidence on dust exposure assessment and health implications in mechanical workshops. Methods: A narrative review of international occupational-hygiene guidance and selected peer-reviewed literature was conducted, focusing on particle fractions, sampling methods, respiratory outcomes and preventive controls. Results: The reviewed evidence identifies material composition, particle size, process characteristics and ventilation as key determinants of exposure. Personal breathing-zone sampling and constituent-specific analysis are necessary for meaningful comparison with occupational exposure limits. Engineering controls, especially source enclosure and local exhaust ventilation, are central to prevention. Conclusion: Risk assessment should integrate exposure characterization, applicable limits and worker health surveillance. No workshop-specific exposure or clinical measurements were collected in this review.

Keywords: industrial dust; mechanical workshop; occupational exposure; inhalable particles; respirable dust; respiratory health; local exhaust ventilation.

Relevance

Mechanical workshops are integral to metalworking, machinery repair and industrial production. Operations such as surface grinding, machining, sanding and welding-related finishing may release metal-bearing dust, abrasive fragments and particles from coatings or processed workpieces. The nature of the hazard depends on the material, process, particle size and ventilation. Inhalable dust may deposit in the upper respiratory tract, whereas smaller respirable particles can penetrate deeply into the lungs [1, 2]. Chronic occupational exposure can contribute to airway irritation and, for certain dust constituents, occupational asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or pneumoconiosis [2–4]. The practical relevance of hygienic assessment lies in identifying high-exposure tasks before preventable disease develops. Importantly, a generic total-dust measurement cannot substitute for a substance-specific evaluation when hazardous metals or crystalline silica are present.

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to synthesize evidence on industrial dust formation in mechanical workshops, describe scientifically grounded methods for assessing airborne dust exposure and evaluate its implications for workers' health, with the aim of identifying effective prevention measures.

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Research Object and Methods

The research object is occupational exposure to airborne particulate matter among workers performing mechanical processing, grinding, polishing, cleaning and related workshop operations. This article is a narrative literature review, not an original field experiment. The methodological basis comprises occupational hygiene guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO), the United States National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and selected peer-reviewed epidemiological literature [1–6].

For workplace assessment, a recommended protocol includes: (i) mapping workstations, materials, operating duration and dust-generating tasks; (ii) collecting personal breathing-zone samples over representative shifts with calibrated pumps and suitable filters; (iii) separately determining inhalable and respirable fractions where relevant; (iv) analyzing specific contaminants, for example crystalline silica by validated analytical methods when exposure is plausible; and (v) comparing time-weighted exposure with the applicable national, substance-specific occupational exposure limit [3, 5, 6]. Repeated samples across workers and shifts are preferable because dust concentrations vary with workload, housekeeping and ventilation. Spirometry, standardized respiratory questionnaires and occupational history can complement exposure assessment under appropriate medical supervision.

Review approach: Sources were selected purposively for their relevance to occupational dust exposure, measurement methods and respiratory health. This is a narrative synthesis rather than a systematic review; no exhaustive database search, formal risk-of-bias assessment or meta-analysis was performed. Recommendations are distinguished from original observations.

Results and Their Discussion

Review of the literature identifies grinding and abrasive finishing as important potential sources of airborne particulate matter in mechanical workshops. Dry operations and compressed-air cleaning may resuspend settled dust, while poorly positioned extraction hoods allow particles to enter workers' breathing zones. Exposure intensity is influenced by tool speed, material hardness, enclosure, air movement and proximity to the emission source. These observations are qualitative: no site-specific concentrations or worker health outcomes were measured in this study.

Particle size has direct hygienic significance. Inhalable particles enter the nose and mouth, while the respirable fraction can reach the alveolar region. However, toxicity cannot be inferred from particle size alone: iron-containing dust, chromium- or nickel-containing particles, coating residues and silica-containing abrasive dust may differ substantially in their effects and regulatory limits [2, 3, 5]. Therefore, reporting only a single mass concentration for "industrial dust" may conceal important differences in risk. Sampling should reflect the actual substances used and produced, with laboratory analysis selected accordingly.

Evidence from occupational epidemiology supports an association between prolonged workplace exposure to dusts, fumes and gases and chronic airflow limitation, although the magnitude of risk differs across jobs and exposure mixtures [4]. Respiratory symptoms such as cough, sputum production, wheeze and breathlessness warrant investigation, but they are not specific to dust exposure. Smoking, previous respiratory disease, age and other workplace agents

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must be considered when interpreting health findings. Silica exposure, where present, deserves special consideration because inhalation of respirable crystalline silica can cause silicosis and is associated with lung cancer and other serious diseases [3, 5]. It would be scientifically incorrect to attribute these silica-specific outcomes to every type of mechanical-workshop dust.

A practical prevention strategy follows the hierarchy of controls. Substitution of less hazardous abrasives and materials, enclosure of dusty processes, local exhaust ventilation at the point of generation and wet dust suppression generally provide more reliable collective protection than personal protective equipment alone [1, 2]. Housekeeping should use HEPA-filtered vacuum systems or other methods that minimize resuspension rather than dry sweeping or compressed air. Respiratory protective equipment remains necessary when residual exposures cannot otherwise be adequately controlled, but selection, fit testing and training are essential. Exposure records, ventilation performance checks and periodic health surveillance can help evaluate whether controls remain effective.

The principal limitation of this review is the absence of original air-sampling and clinical data. Consequently, the discussion does not establish local prevalence, numerical exceedance of exposure limits or causal effects in a particular workshop. Future field research should use personal sampling over multiple shifts, characterize dust composition, document ventilation and compare exposure groups while adjusting health analyses for major confounders.

Conclusion

Industrial dust in mechanical workshops is a heterogeneous occupational hazard whose significance depends on particle size, chemical composition, exposure duration and control effectiveness. A robust hygienic evaluation requires representative personal monitoring, identification of hazardous constituents and comparison with applicable substance-specific exposure limits. Respiratory risk reduction should focus on process modification, source capture, wet methods, safe housekeeping and appropriate medical surveillance. Original workplace measurements and worker-level health data are required to quantify risk in any individual mechanical workshop.

Declarations

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