



BFAWU GUIDE TO ASTHMA

Asthma is a condition which causes the constriction of the airways. This leads to symptoms of wheezing, chest tightness, breathlessness and coughing.

It is estimated that 95% - 99% of all cases of asthma are due to a natural predisposition. However, some 1% - 5% of cases are estimated to be caused by a person's occupation. As well as the number of people whose asthma is caused by their work many thousands who have an pre-existing condition find their symptoms made worse by triggers in the workplace.

The Health and Safety Executive have recognised bakery workers as being at a high risk of suffering from occupational asthma.

Flour dust and enzymes which are contained in additives such as Amylase are the second most common cause of occupational asthma and for this reason extra vigilance is needed if working in the baking industry.

The exposure to flour dust and Amylase is regulated by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 1989. In addition, the Health and Safety Executive have set maximum exposure levels in relation to hazardous substances. They have included flour within their list of such substances.



A reasonable employer **must**:-

- Reduce the exposure of an employee to flour and other additives to the lowest level which is reasonably practicable.
- Make suitable and sufficient assessments of the risks to health of all employees in relation to exposure to flour and additives.
- If it is not possible to prevent exposure then methods must be put in place to ensure that any exposure is adequately controlled, for example, the use of personal protective equipment. **(The use of PPE is not the first alternative to control dust).**
- Ensure that all employees are properly trained, informed and instructed in relation to exposures that can arise and the use of protective equipment.
- Engage a suitable procedure for monitoring the exposure to flour and other additives encountered by employees.
- Provide health surveillance.

If you are being regularly exposed to flour and other additives and your employers are not attempting to control this exposure then you may be at risk of becoming sensitised to the flour or the additives and suffering from occupational asthma.



Occupational Asthma can also be caused by exposure to proteins in shellfish, some cleaning materials and some paint spraying operations in livery departments.

If you have any questions or concerns on baker's asthma or any other type of asthma you should contact your Branch Secretary in the first instance. Alternatively, please contact Head Office on 01707 260150

