

# Farmers urged to protect against organic dust

by Theresa Whalen

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Organic dust is a silent hazard on farms. It's easy to ignore – but can cause serious short and long term health problems.

Organic dust from hay, grain, fuel chips, straw and livestock can contain irritating moulds, pollen, bacteria, pesticides, chemicals, feed and bedding particles as well as animal particles including hair, feathers and droppings. Heavy concentrations of organic dust are common in grain bins, livestock pens, swine buildings and other enclosed spaces. And that's where farmers work.

Over time, exposure to organic dust can contribute to illnesses such as asthma, nose and eye infections, chronic bronchitis. Extensive exposure causes serious respiratory illnesses such as Organic Dust Toxic Syndrome (ODTS) – a temporary flu-like illness or "Farmer's Lung," an allergic disease caused by mould spores the body's immune system cannot counteract.

Farmers may experience worsening symptoms of respiratory distress when working in a confined space; working in buildings closed for the winter; or working in high concentrations of dust, mist, vapour, fumes or gases. And exposure to organic grain dust can be just as risky as smoking. Farmers who smoke increase their risks of developing serious short and long-term lung disease.

If you or someone on your farm needs to work in an area that is dusty, wear a dust mask or respirator. There are many types of respirators and it is important to match the respirator to the job. Seek professional advice to select and fit dust respirators (e.g. masks with HEPA high-efficiency particulate air filters) to protect your lungs from mould spores and bacteria.

One size does *not* fit all; a dust mask or respirator needs to be fit-tested on the person who uses it. All people who use one of these devices needs to be properly trained in its fit, use and maintenance.

*“PPE only works if you use it!”* is this year's Canadian agricultural safety campaign theme with a focus on the use, fit and access of personal protective equipment (PPE) in agriculture. The yearlong campaign was launched last March with Canadian Agricultural Safety Week.

More information on buying and fitting respiratory protection go to [www.casa-acsa.ca](http://www.casa-acsa.ca) , <http://www.cchsa-ccssma.usask.ca/ahsn/resources.php> or [www.cfa-fca.ca](http://www.cfa-fca.ca) .

- 30 -

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