

Protecting Your Family – Heavy Metal Cross Contamination

The health and safety of our Soldiers, Civilians, and their Families is our top priority. Chromium/ chromium compounds and other heavy metals, such as lead, cadmium, and beryllium, have been recognized by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists to pose a potential exposure health risk. Mitigation measures to prevent or reduce exposures to these identified metals continue to be implemented across the Army. While the Army is working to put these mitigation measures into place, Soldiers and Civilians can take steps to protect themselves and their Families at home. While it is possible to bring metal contaminants from the work place to the home, the following information will help to reduce cross contamination.

Metal dust from your work can be transferred to your home via your skin, hair, clothes and shoes. When you return home, the metal dust can then be transferred to your furniture, floors, or in your car where your Family members may be exposed. This may present an unnecessary hazard to your Family members as metal dust is known to cause adverse health effects. If you work around or with any heavy metals, the recommendation is to ensure that metal dust is not brought home.

What can you do to prevent exposures at home?

To reduce the amount of metal contaminants that enter your home, you should—

- Take off your work shoes prior to walking throughout your home (e.g., remove your work shoes in your garage or as soon as you enter your home).
- Change out of your work clothes right away, and shower as soon as you get home.
- Segregate your work clothes from other clothing, and wash your work clothes immediately.
- Wash your work clothes in a separate load of laundry from your Family's clothes.

Additional mitigation efforts that can help keep metal contaminants from leaving work:

- Wash contaminants off prior to leaving the workplace. Wash your hands and face before leaving work. If your workplace has a shower, take a shower before leaving work.
- If available, use a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuum on your clothes to remove metal dust.
- Change into workplace-specific clothing so that metal dust does not get on your street (home) clothes.
- Keep your dirty work clothes and shoes separate from your clean clothes.
- Change your clothes and shoes before leaving work.

Who you can talk to?

- If you have specific questions, talk to your supervisor, safety office, or industrial hygiene office.
- Talk to your doctor or occupational health provider concerning personal or Family health issues/concerns.

- Talk to your household members about mitigation efforts to reduce workplace hazards in the home. Explain that it is important to avoid bringing these hazards into the home and stress the importance of preventing cross-contamination from workplace items to home items (e.g., work clothing and street (home) clothes).

Reference:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/repro/takehome.html>