

Combustible dust hazard: Refusing unsafe work

As a worker, you play a key role in your own safety — as well as the safety of your fellow workers. That’s why, under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, you have the duty and right to refuse work that presents an undue hazard.

If your workplace produces large quantities of wood dust, it’s considered an undue hazard to allow that dust to accumulate in a contained area that’s near a source of heat or ignition.

From dust cloud to lethal fireball

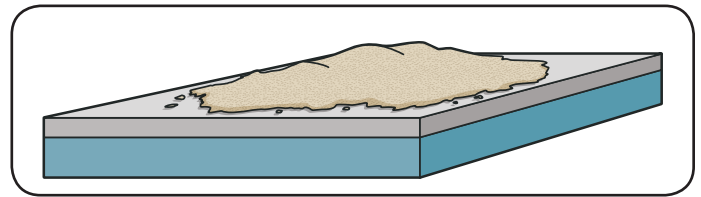
A handful of fine wood dust can be enough to fuel an explosion: all it takes is an eighth of an inch of accumulated dust, covering as little as five percent of the surface in a contained area.

Exercising your right to refuse unsafe work

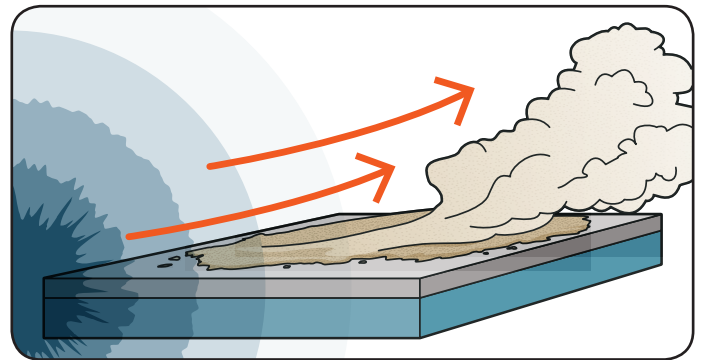
Should you see an accumulation of dust you believe could lead to a fire or explosion, you must refuse to continue working. And, you must immediately report the undue hazard to your supervisor or employer.

If you refuse to work under conditions that could lead to a combustible dust explosion, you’re doing the right thing. Remember, you cannot be disciplined or fired from your job for putting safety first.

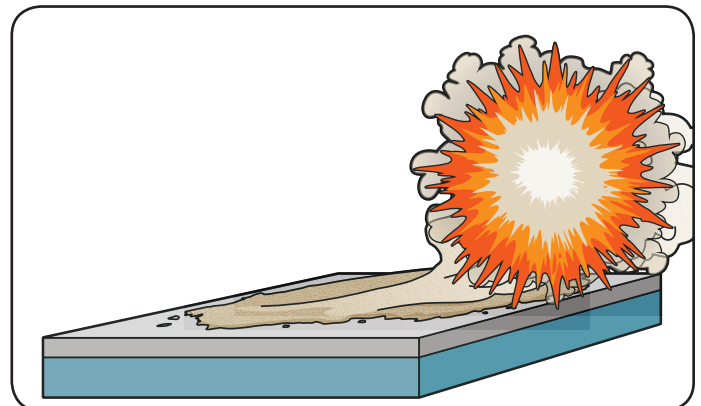
How dust explosions happen



Fine wood dust settles on a flat surface



An event disturbs the wood dust, forming a cloud



The dust cloud is ignited and explodes

The role of your supervisor

Once you have reported the undue hazard, your supervisor or employer must investigate it immediately. They will need to ensure the dust hazards are removed — without delay.

In most cases, your supervisor or employer will be able to fix the problem. But, in instances where they decide no undue hazard exists, they are obliged to let you know. At that point, they are required to investigate the issue with you and one of the following other people:

- A worker who's a member of your joint occupational health and safety committee
- A worker selected by your union
- Or, if you don't have a joint occupational health and safety committee or a union, any other worker you select

What to do next

If the issue remains unresolved after the joint investigation, you and your supervisor or the employer must report the matter immediately to WorkSafeBC.

Summary of the steps

- 1 Report the undue hazard to your supervisor.
- 2 Your supervisor or employer must investigate immediately.
- 3 If they don't agree there's an undue hazard, they must tell you and inspect the area again with you, and a member of your union or health and safety committee.
- 4 If the issue is still unresolved after the joint inspection, contact WorkSafeBC immediately.

If a significant cloud of dust forms near a source of heat or ignition, stop working and tell your supervisor immediately.

Find out more

Contact WorkSafeBC's Information Prevention Line at 604.276.3100 or 1.888.621.7233. For more information on protection against combustible dust hazards, visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com) or [fipibc.ca](https://www.fipibc.ca).