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OCCUPATIONAL SKIN DISEASE—FINDINGS OF A TWO YEARS STUDY IN AUCKLAND

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CM Vasisht. *Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, New Zealand*

Background Occupational skin disease (dermatitis) is one of the most widespread causes of discomfort and ill-health at work. Chronic dermatitis can make working impossible and causes workers to lose their jobs.

Aim The aim of this paper is to present the findings of a 2 years study conducted in Auckland and Whangarei.

Methods Workplaces were assessed using a checklist and, an employee questionnaire. Approximately 400 workplaces were visited and more than 1200 employees completed and returned the questionnaires. The industries/occupations included in the study were; bakers, butchers, boat builders, cleaners, dental technicians, dye manufacturers, florists, gardeners, health care workers, hairdressers, machine operators, metal manufacturers, nurses, panel-beaters, printers, plumbers, process workers, spray-painters, veterinarians, etc.

Results Wet work and chemical exposure were found to be significantly associated with dermatitis prevalence. Thirty seven percent of the employed workforce reported symptoms of dermatitis. Twenty two percent of the workforce reported their symptoms as work related. Butchers, hairdressers and printers were found to be the most affected. Gender and skin tone does not appear to make much difference to dermatitis occurrence. About half (49%) of the

workers in the age group of 15–30 years emerged as more prone to skin disorders. The hand is the most affected body part to suffer from dermatitis symptoms.

Significance Educating workers, targeting high risk occupations, controlling causal agents, provision of good hygiene practices, and availability of engineering controls and personal protective clothing and equipment are some important steps that could be implemented to reduce prevalence of dermatitis in workplaces.