

**INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
ON THE PROTECTION OF HOSPITAL WORKERS FROM
OCCUPATIONAL RISKS RELATED TO CARCINOGENS
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A labour inspectorate's perspective on carcinogens in hospitals

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority (NLIA) works toward ensuring that businesses comply with health and safety legislation. The NLIA has been in the business of occupational safety and health for approximately 130 years.

Work-related cancer remains a formidable challenge in Norway, more so in some sectors and occupations than others. The most common occupational cancers are still mesothelioma and lung cancer. But many healthcare workers are exposed are also exposed to a range of carcinogens, and the healthcare sector employs 550,000 workers, of which 80% are women. About 100,000 are employed in hospitals.

The relevant exposures at hospitals include ionizing radiation, antineoplastic agents, formaldehyde, night shift work and artificial UVR. However, we have to also account for drivers, cleaners and laundry service workers who also work at these places and are the blind spot. Diesel and cleaning products are also carcinogenic and can impact workers such as cleaners and drivers in a hospital.

The NLIA utilizes risk-based inspections, guidance and notably tripartite collaborations to reduce exposures to carcinogens. Working environment regulations also require hospitals to have occupational health services that contribute to risk assessments and preventive measures.

NLIAs strategic intervention is through market surveillance and regulation to set occupational exposure limits for carcinogens. We work with our research agency and develop OELs with input from social partners. NLIA conducts seminars for the social partners to provide knowledge to protect the workers from dangerous chemicals, including carcinogens. A central tenet in our preventive approach is the utility of the hierarchy of controls to all dangerous chemicals, including carcinogens.

Finally, to be a professional and independent labour inspectorate, competence is fundamental. People from diverse backgrounds such as industrial hygiene, safety engineering, psychologists, lawyers, and doctors are at the core of our preventive work, including work-related cancer. Occupational medicine has been a long-standing companion at the Labour Inspectorate in Norway and has served the NLIA for over 100 years. Doctors' latest contribution has been advising hospitals on scheduling night shifts to reduce health-related problems, including the risk of breast cancer among nurses.