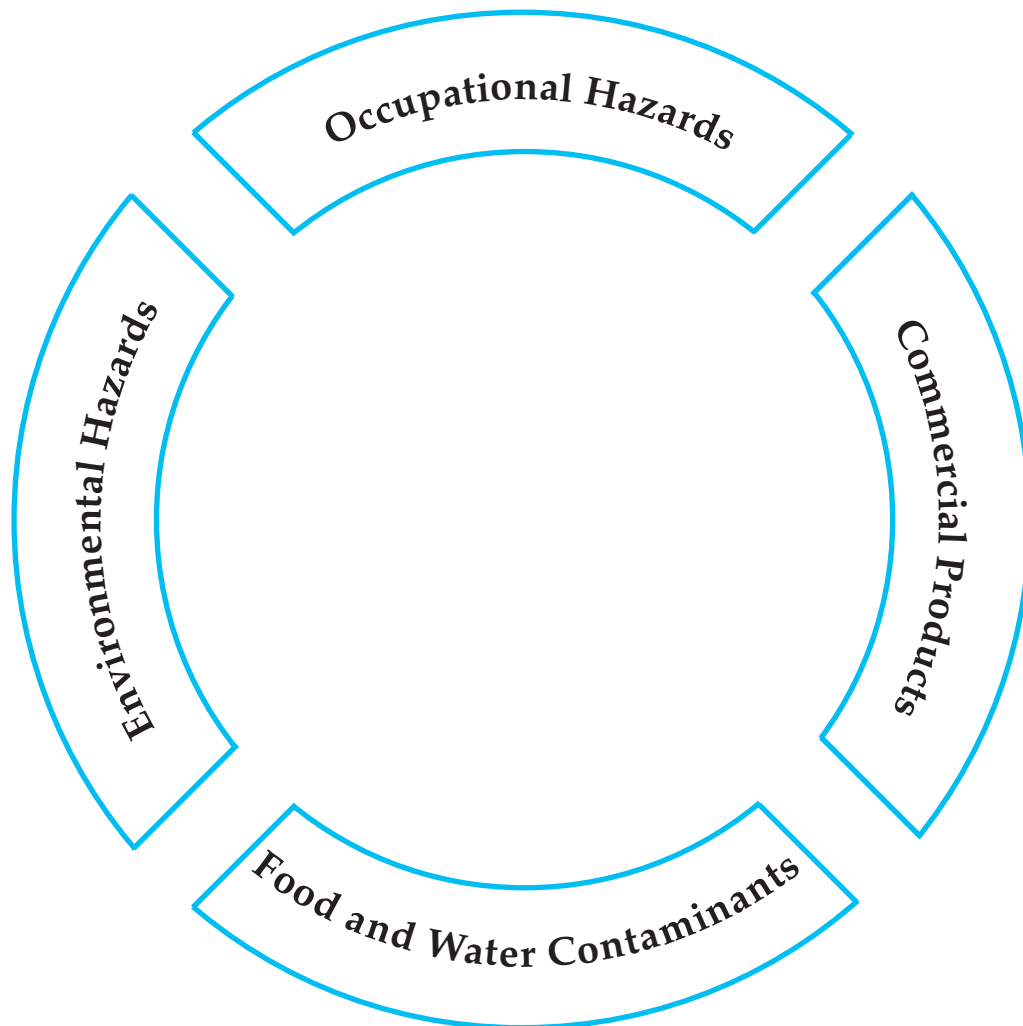


The Facts About... Pollutants and Toxins



Toxic agents may pose a threat to human health as occupational hazards, environmental pollutants, contaminants of food and water supplies, or the components of potentially hazardous commercial products, according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. They can contribute to conditions that are potentially lethal, including cancer and other diseases of the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, bladder, and neurological system. In 1990, approximately 100,000 deaths were related to toxic agent exposures.

Source: Journal of the American Medical Association

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What are occupational hazards?

Workplace exposures to hazardous materials cause or aggravate diseases as common and diverse as asthma, cancer, dermatitis, and tuberculosis. There are an estimated 125,000 to 350,000 new cases of occupational disease per year. Both employers and employees may be misinformed or unaware of chemical names and toxic effects. Fewer than 20 percent of industrial chemicals in the United States have been adequately tested for toxicity in humans, according to the [New England Journal of Medicine](#).



What are environmental pollutants?

Environmental pollutants include smog, pollen, soot, and dust. Air quality has improved over the last 20 years, but air pollution is still an important health problem in the United States, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Asbestos, carbon monoxide, tobacco smoke, and radon can cause injury or death. Cigarette smoke causes the most cases of death from lung cancer in the United States. High levels of carbon monoxide can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea, and weakness. At very high levels, carbon monoxide poisoning can cause death. Radon can damage lung tissue which can lead to lung cancer.



What are food and water contaminants?

Many different pathogens, poisonous chemicals and harmful substances can contaminate food and water, which can lead to foodborne diseases, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). The most recognized foodborne diseases are e-coli, mad cow disease, and salmonella.



What are potentially hazardous components of commercial products?

Ingestion of harmful substances are among the most common causes of injury to children less than 6 years of age, according to the [New England Journal of Medicine](#). In 1998, there were more than 1 million instances of toxic substance ingestion by children under 6 years of age that were reported to poison centers. According to health officials, only about a quarter of these poisonings are reported to control centers. Substances such as cosmetics, personal health-care products, cleaning products, prescription and over-the-counter drugs are responsible for many injuries and deaths. Lead poisoning is entirely preventable, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). However, nearly 1 million children living in the United States have lead levels in their blood that are high enough to cause irreversible damage to their health.