



Answers to questions about structures, ventilation, soil, water, waste, energy, machinery and safety.

## Is it farmer's lung or TODS?

Farmers are at high risk to respiratory health hazards. A 1989 Bureau of Labor Statistics study established that the overall incidence rate of occupational illnesses for all workers was 26.1 per 10,000 workers. The same study estimated the incidence rate for agriculture at 51.7 per 10,000 workers. Ag workers had the highest incidence rates for skin diseases and respiratory conditions due to toxic agents and poisoning.

Yet, by understanding farm respiratory dangers and taking a few simple precautions most of the risk and medical expense can be eliminated. Let's look at three hazards associated with dusts and molds.

Farmers' Lung disease is caused by inhaling small to large amounts of organic dust from moldy hay, straw and grain. This exposure triggers an allergic reaction in a few sensitive individuals. Symptoms appear 4-8 hours after exposure and may resemble anything from a cold to pneumonia. Scar tissue forms permanently in the lungs. Repeated exposure increases this tissue damage and causes shortness of breath that can become so severe the victim finds it hard to even get out of a chair.

Toxic Organic Dust Syndrome (TODS) symptoms are similar to Farmer's Lung. However, TODS does not produce long-term illness or cause permanent lung damage. To contract TODS, you must inhale massive amounts of moldy dust.

Nuisance dusts are mostly inorganic in nature. Inhaling them usually doesn't cause an allergic reaction, although repeated exposure can harden the lung tissue, reducing oxygen intake and increasing vulnerability to respiratory diseases like pneumonia, tuberculosis and bronchitis.

A NIOSH/MSHA-approved toxic dust respirator is your best protection against these three hazards. Cost ranges from \$3 to \$22 each, depending on durability and reusability. The unit must seal well around the nose and mouth to be effective. Facial hair, even one day's growth, can prevent a good seal.

For more information about these and other respiratory hazards, refer to MU Extension publication G1935, [How to Protect Yourself From Respiratory Hazards](#).