

## N E W S   R E L E A S E

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### **Cal/OSHA Reminds Employers of Risks of Valley Fever, Urges Employers to Take Preventative Measures**

**Oakland**—Cal/OSHA reminds employers of the risks of *Coccidioidomycosis* (also known as Valley Fever), a potentially serious illness caused by the inhalation of fungal spores. These spores are present in the soils in the Central Valley and many other areas in California. A [Valley Fever informational page](#) has been posted with resources for workers and employers.

“Employers need to be aware of the Valley Fever risk and take preventative measures when soils are disturbed in regions where the spores are likely to be present,” said Department of Industrial Relations’ (DIR) Director Christine Baker. Cal/OSHA, also known as the Division of Occupational Safety and Health, is a division of DIR.

“The recent increase in confirmed work-related Valley Fever cases signals a need for heightened awareness and action by employers and workers,” said Acting Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum.

In California, Valley Fever is caused by a microscopic fungus known as *Coccidioides* which lives in the top two to 12 inches of soil. When soil is disturbed by activities such as digging, grading, driving, or when high winds circulate dusts, fungal spores can become airborne and potentially be inhaled by workers. A [recent publication](#) reports an average annual increase of 13% in the incidence of reported Valley Fever cases in California. While the fungus is consistently present in the soil of many undeveloped areas, highly [endemic](#) counties are Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Luis Obispo, and Tulare. The number of new Valley Fever cases reported in California has increased dramatically in the last few years, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Employers have a legal responsibility to report to Cal/OSHA any serious injury or illness, or death, of an employee occurring in a place of employment or in connection with any employment.

Tips for reducing the risk of Valley Fever exposure include:

- Determine if a worksite is in an area where fungal spores are likely to be present.
- Adopt site plans and work practices that minimize the disturbance of soil and maximize ground cover.
- Use water, appropriate soil stabilizers, and/or re-vegetation to reduce airborne dust.
- Limit workers' exposure to outdoor dust in disease-endemic areas.
- When exposure to dust is unavoidable, provide approved respiratory protection to filter particles.
- Train supervisors and workers in how to recognize symptoms of Valley Fever and minimize exposure.

In September, Cal/OSHA issued citations to six employers following an outbreak of Valley Fever on construction sites at California Valley Ranch and Topaz Solar Farms, both located in Santa Margarita, San Luis Obispo County. The employers were cited for a range of violations including failure to properly report cases of Valley Fever among their employees, failure to control exposure to contaminated dust at the worksite and failure to provide and ensure use of appropriate respiratory protection.

Three of the contractors received Willful regulatory citations for neglecting to report to Cal/OSHA, as required, that employees were hospitalized while undergoing treatment for Valley Fever. Penalties associated with these citations were a total of \$40,680 to Bechtel Construction Operations, \$45,740 to CLP Resources and \$39,225 to Papich Construction Company. Citations were also issued to CSI Electrical Contractors, Hotline Construction and First Solar Incorporated.

For more resources on creating safe working conditions, or to learn more about California workplace health and safety standards please visit Cal/OSHA's [website](#). Cal/OSHA's [Consultation Program](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers and employee organizations to improve their health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from the Cal/OSHA Consultation Program.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may call the toll-free California Worker's Information Line at (866) 924-9757 for recorded information, in English and Spanish, on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA District Offices](#).

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