

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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OVERVIEW: WHAT IS HEALTH WATCH

What is *Health Watch*?

For the last 30 years, the Australian Institute of Petroleum (AIP) has sponsored an independent health study called *Health Watch*. *Health Watch* is a university-based research study and is currently conducted by the Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health (MonCOEH), a leading international centre for health and epidemiological research at Monash University. Since 1980, *Health Watch* has been following the health of about 19,000 past and present employees from major participating oil and gas companies, who joined the Study from work sites across Australia.

What are the Objectives of *Health Watch*?

For participating employees, *Health Watch* records any occurrence of cancer and, eventually, the cause of death. By comparing the findings for people in different jobs and sectors within the petroleum industry, with the cancer and death rates in the general Australian population, *Health Watch* provides valuable information about the risks associated with working with petroleum products and ways in which these risks may be controlled. *Health Watch* also makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge base of the petroleum industry and provides important information to the Australian community to understand the health impacts of exposure to petroleum products.

Is Participation in *Health Watch* Compulsory?

Participation in *Health Watch* is voluntary, and the employee participation rate has been outstanding. About 95% of the industry's employees who were previously approached to participate in the Study joined *Health Watch* including employees from refineries, distribution terminals, and production sites onshore and offshore. The study has historically enjoyed very strong support from employees, unions and companies. Participating companies are committed to supporting the Study as it is internationally recognised and respected, and is highly valued by its members.

Employees in the industry were enrolled in *Health Watch* by participating in one or more of four industry surveys over the past three decades, using a detailed job and health questionnaire.

What does *Health Watch* Study?

The main focus and output of the study is an analysis of cancer and death incidence among petroleum industry employees compared with the general Australian population.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) compiles data for the National Death Index (NDI) and the National Cancer Statistics Clearing House (NCSCH) on behalf of all State Death and Cancer Registries. Deaths and cancers for past and present employees in *Health Watch* are obtained by matching the *Health Watch* data (obtained when Monash conducts a survey of employees) with the data from the Registries.

Results are published in periodic *Health Watch* reports (of which the latest report is the 13th) and in scientific medical journals.

FINDINGS OF HEALTH WATCH

What has the *Health Watch* study found so far?

Overall, the Study clearly shows that petroleum industry employees have better health than the general Australian community and are less likely to die of the diseases commonly causing death - including cancer, heart and respiratory conditions.

Where can I get the detailed findings?

The detailed findings of the Study are independently published in *Health Watch* reports and these are available to employees and the general community.

The latest *Health Watch* reports (ie. the 13th, 12th and 11th Reports) and the *Health Watch* Case Control Report (called the Lympho-haematopoietic Cancer and Exposure to Benzene in the Australian Petroleum Industry, Technical Report and Appendices) are available from the AIP website at <http://www.aip.com.au/health/ohs.htm>.

HOW IS HEALTH WATCH CONDUCTED

Health Watch covers those petroleum industry employees from all major oil and gas companies who voluntarily join the program. Employees in the industry were enrolled in the study by participating in one or more of four industry surveys (including during worksite visits by the Study team) over the past three decades using a detailed job and health questionnaire.

Monash University are now conducting a new survey and are recruiting all petroleum industry employees from relevant Australian worksites.

Once you volunteer into the *Health Watch* study, you become a member for life, including if you leave the company or industry. However, employees are free to leave the Study at anytime, either by ceasing future correspondence with *Health Watch* or by having your details removed from the Study database.

Employees who have resigned or retired from participating companies are contacted periodically for an update of their employment and health status.

WHO RUNS THE *HEALTH WATCH* STUDY

Who currently conducts the *Health Watch* Study?

Health Watch is currently conducted by the Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health (MonCOEH), a leading international centre for health and epidemiological research at Monash University.

The Study was designed by Professor David Christie and was previously carried out by the University of Melbourne from 1980 to 1998. The University of Adelaide ran the study from 1999 to 2005, before being transferred to Monash University with the retirement of Dr Richie Gun (the lead researcher at the University of Adelaide).

Who is in the Monash University *Health Watch* team?

Professor Malcolm Sim is the Director of the Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health (MONCOEH) and is the Principal investigator for *Health Watch*.

Dr Deborah Glass is a Senior Research Fellow with MONCOEH and has been involved with *Health Watch* since 1995. She is also the Principal Investigator for the *Health Watch* Case Control study.

Ms Elisa Wood is a Research Fellow with MONCOEH currently involved with the *Health Watch* study.

Ms Ros Moye has been employed as a Research Assistant to facilitate the collection of data from *Health Watch* participants.

COMPANY PARTICIPATION IN *HEALTH WATCH*

Which petroleum companies participate in *Health Watch*?

Health Watch is sponsored by the Australian Institute of Petroleum (AIP), so AIP member companies involved with petroleum products participate in the Study (called 'Participating Companies').

These companies include the Shell Company of Australia, ExxonMobil Australia, Caltex Australia Ltd, BP Australia, Woodside Energy, Santos Ltd and Chevron Australia.

What is the Australian Institute of Petroleum (AIP)?

AIP was established in 1976 as the key representative body of Australia's petroleum industry.

The AIP's mission is to promote and assist in the development of a strong internationally competitive Australian petroleum products industry, operating efficiently, economically and safely, and in harmony with the environment and community standards. Through the active involvement of its member companies, AIP provides responsible, professional and principled representation of the industry along with factual and informed discussion of petroleum issues – including those related to the health of industry employees.

What are the governance arrangements for *Health Watch*?

Health Watch is an independent university-based research study, conducted by Monash University.

The study has been approved by the Monash University Ethics Committee and is conducted according to the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine's Guidelines for Good Epidemiological Research.

All information volunteered by employees or collected through the cancer and death registries remain confidential to *Health Watch* and will not be shared with employers or third parties.

Health Watch is sponsored by AIP and overseen by a joint advisory committee with participation from the ACTU, AIP and participating companies.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN HEALTH WATCH

How many employees participate in *Health Watch*?

Since 1980, *Health Watch* has been following the health of about 19,000 past and present employees from participating major oil and gas companies, who joined the Study from worksites across Australia. Given the significant benefits of the Study, AIP and participating companies are funding Monash University to conduct a major survey of petroleum industry employees across Australia in 2010, covering new employees that have joined the industry since the last major survey, as well as existing *Health Watch* members.

Which employees are Eligible to join *Health Watch*?

Within *Health Watch* participating companies, those employees with regular / longer term exposure to petroleum products are the focus of the *Health Watch* study. This includes employees working at refineries, storage and distribution terminals, offshore and onshore production facilities and airports who, as part of their everyday duties, have regular exposure to petroleum products such as petrol, diesel, jet fuel and crude oil. All employees, both men and women, at these relevant worksites are eligible to be included in *Health Watch* and can do so by completing a survey from Monash University. Head Office employees will not be surveyed, unless they are already members of *Health Watch*.

If I am eligible to join, how will I be surveyed for *Health Watch*?

As a participant in *Health Watch*, you will be asked to complete a survey about your current and previous employment and some general lifestyle and medical questions. For most people, the *Health Watch* questionnaire, designed by the University, may be completed on a computer in a specially arranged session at your worksite when a Monash University Researcher will be available to answer questions. Alternatively you will be able to complete it at a time of your choosing on line, or where necessary via telephone or post. Your responses to the questionnaire will be confidential to you and Monash University, and will not be shared with third parties. Each survey questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete. A member of the Monash University *Health Watch* team will be available to help you fill out the questionnaire at your worksite or via telephone or post.

As a *Health Watch* participant, you will be asked to give consent to have your name searched against the national death and cancer registries. All information volunteered by you or collected through the death and cancer registries remain confidential to *Health Watch* and will not be shared with third parties.

When will I know when the *Health Watch* survey is being conducted?

More detailed information on the survey and questionnaire will be available in the coming months, including when you or your worksite can be expected to be contacted or visited by a Monash University researcher. In order to carry out the new survey, your company will need to provide Monash University with a list of current employees at relevant worksites across Australia. If you do not wish your company to provide your name and contact number/email to Monash University so you can have the opportunity to join your colleagues in *Health Watch*, you can choose to 'opt-out' of participation.

If I join *Health Watch*, is my Privacy and information protected?

YES, at all times.

Your employer will NOT have access to personal information about you and your data will not be reported individually in any *Health Watch* documents (so that you cannot be identified).

Participating companies will only have the benefit of the Study's overall research findings to assist it to meet its employee and community obligations. In addition, storage of the data collected will adhere to Monash University regulations. All data will be stored in a secure, staff access only area and administrative files relating to the study are only accessible by *Health Watch* research staff and are password protected. Data will be destroyed 7 years after the completion of the study.

If I join *Health Watch*, can I decide to withdraw at a later stage?

Employees who join *Health Watch* remain part of the Study for life - including if you leave the company or industry. However, you are free to leave the Study at anytime, either by ceasing future correspondence with *Health Watch* or by having your details removed from the Study database.

What happens if I don't want to join *Health Watch*?

You are under no obligation to join *Health Watch*. You can opt out by refusing to let your company release your name and contact details to Monash University. Alternatively you can refuse to complete the survey. The study will be less powerful without good participation from eligible employees but there is no consequence to individuals. Strong employee participation will help ensure the study covers as many industry employees as possible and, thereby, provide real value to employees and the knowledge base of the industry.

What happens if I leave the petroleum industry?

Employees who join *Health Watch* remain part of the Study for life - including if you leave the company or industry. This is because some health effects may take many years to show up, so it is important that members are followed up over a long period. However, you are free to leave the Study at anytime, either by ceasing future correspondence with *Health Watch* or by having your details removed from the Study database.

I was previously surveyed under *Health Watch* – how do I check if my details are correct and if I am still part of the Study?

If you were previously surveyed under *Health Watch* and did not contact *Health Watch* to have your details removed from the study, then you are still a member of *Health Watch*. You can contact the Monash Research Team via the contact details above.

How often will I be surveyed by *Health Watch*?

Typically, *Health Watch* conducts surveys of current *Health Watch* participants and eligible AIP company employees approximately every five years.

I've completed my first *Health Watch* survey. What happens next?

The information you provide in your survey will be added to the *Health Watch* database. You will be asked to complete another survey in about five years' time.

Specific Employee Questions on Eligibility to Participate in *Health Watch*

[Are contractors included in the employee survey?](#)

No. Unfortunately *Health Watch* can only include people who work in the petroleum industry as an employee of the AIP companies who participate in the study.

This is to assist with the recruitment and tracking of petroleum industry workers now and into the future, and to ensure that workplace environmental factors that impact on individual health outcomes are known and can be taken into account in the analysis of the survey data.

The monitoring of workers employed by the same participating companies (which hasn't changed over the study), during their employment in the industry and into retirement, underpins the Study's scientific validity and credentials and is why *Health Watch* is an internationally recognised and respected study. The consistent approach over such a long period has been a key to this achievement and reputation. As a result there will be no change this year to this longstanding survey approach.

Adopting a different approach, may compromise the validity of the study. For example, while independent contractors do work for HW participating companies, many also work for other companies in the industry and also across different industry sectors with potentially different exposures to petroleum products and other hazardous chemicals compared to workers in *Health Watch* participating companies.

[I am a contractor now but used to work for an AIP member company. Can I participate in the Study?](#)

If you have joined *Health Watch* previously (that is, you have completed a questionnaire before as part of a university survey), you are still part of *Health Watch* - even if you have changed jobs or are employed as a contractor by *Health Watch* participating companies. However, if you have not already joined *Health Watch*, and are not a current employee of a company participating in *Health Watch*, then you are not eligible to join *Health Watch*.

[What happens if I am not working as an employee with an AIP company in five years' time? Will I still be eligible to receive a survey?](#)

Yes. If you are surveyed by *Health Watch* you remain with the study for life. At the time of the next survey, if you are no longer employed by a participating company, *Health Watch* will attempt to contact you in about five years' time at the postal address you provide on your survey. If your postal address details change in this time you can let *Health Watch* know by contacting the study team on 1800 631 772 or email healthwatch@med.monash.edu.au.

[I am 56 years old and have been in the office for the last 10 years but prior to that I was a blue-collar worker. Am I eligible?](#)

Employees who join *Health Watch* remain part of the Study for life - including if you leave the company or industry, or change jobs within a petroleum company. If you have joined *Health Watch* previously (that is, you have completed a questionnaire before as part of a survey), you are still part of *Health Watch* - even if you have changed jobs. If this is the case, you will be surveyed again in 2010 by Monash University. However, if you have not been surveyed before and are currently working in a head office, you will not be surveyed this year.

[Why aren't retail operators and attendants in the study?](#)

The *Health Watch* study only investigates employees who work in the production and distribution sectors of the petroleum industry and have regular exposure to petroleum products. The exposure at retail worksites is generally similar to that of the general community. That is, the occupational exposure is very low. This is because petroleum companies have, over many years, introduced a range of measures (e.g. vapour recovery) to reduce exposure in these types of situations to safe levels.

CONTACT THE HEALTH WATCH RESEARCH TEAM

Employees can contact the Monash Research team on:

Freecall number: 1800 631 772 or

E-mail: healthwatch@med.monash.edu.au.

PUBLISHED HEALTH WATCH REPORTS

The detailed findings of the Study are independently published in *Health Watch* reports and these are available to employees and the general community.

The latest *Health Watch* reports (ie. the 13th, 12th and 11th Reports) and the *Health Watch* Case Control Report (called the Lympho-haematopoietic Cancer and Exposure to Benzene in the Australian Petroleum Industry, Technical Report and Appendices) are available from the AIP website at <http://www.aip.com.au/health/ohs.htm>.

WANT MORE INFORMATION

Background information on *Health Watch*, including the latest health results, is available from AIP at <http://www.aip.com.au/health/ohs.htm>. You can also contact AIP at aip@aip.com.au.

For any questions in relation to *Health Watch* and the upcoming employee Survey, the Monash University study team can be contacted via email at healthwatch@med.monash.edu.au or on the Freecall number 1800 631 772.

You can also contact your company's Occupation Health Officer if you have any questions in relation to your company's participation in *Health Watch*.