

# **The Grave Danger of Workplace Dust Explosions**

To the uninitiated, industrial dust may seem as harmless as the dust on the bedroom dresser. The truth is, however, that explosive dust is responsible for numerous deaths each year in the industrial setting.

While dust levels in grain-handling environments are closely regulated, the dust in other industries – industries with a total of 2.5 million workers – is unregulated. Dust explosions can occur due to fine particles of wood, metal, food or chemicals in factories. These explosions killed 119 and injured 718 workers between 1980 and 2005, according to a 2006 U.S. Chemical Safety Board study.

The Safety Board recommended in 2007 that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration create rules to alleviate the problem. OSHA is studying the issue, and in the meantime it has created a National Emphasis Program to educate people and inspect plants. The inspections, however, focus on housekeeping and worker training, rather than specific rules about explosive dust.

## **Pennsylvania Workers' Compensation for Explosion Injuries**

Workplace explosions can cause very serious injuries, even death. For workers who have been burned or otherwise injured, the medical bills can be large and the recovery time long.

Workers' compensation benefits can pay for the medical bills and lost wages. For certain family members who have lost a loved one to a work-related injury, workers' compensation provides benefits based on what the deceased worker would have received.

# **The Future of Explosive-Dust Regulations**

Dust explosions remain a serious problem, including in Pennsylvania workplaces. When OSHA designs and implements regulations to protect workers from dust explosions, the number of deaths and injuries could significantly decrease, just as they did after grain-dust regulations were put into place.