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Increased risk of cancer for computer factory workers, large study shows

Workers at computer factories are at increased risk of dying of cancer. The largest study of its kind published today in the open access journal Environmental Health (<http://www.ehjournal.net/>) looks at over 30,000 deaths of workers who had been employed at IBM factories in the USA. The study reveals that IBM factory workers were more likely to have died of cancer, including brain, kidney or breast cancer and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, than the rest of the population. The author of the study cannot link these deaths to any specific chemicals or other toxic exposures. The current study confirms previous, smaller studies and highlights clear health risks for workers in computer factories across the world.

Richard Clapp, from the Boston University School of Public Health, USA, studied the causes of death among all IBM factory workers who had worked for the company for at least five years between 1969 and 2001. Clapp analysed the causes of death for 31,941 workers and compared them with causes of death among the American population during this period. The data were obtained from the IBM corporation as part of a California lawsuit against IBM, and the plaintiffs' attorneys contracted with Clapp to carry out the analysis.

The results of Clapp's analysis indicate that there was increased mortality due to several types of cancer, especially in manufacturing workers and workers at particular plants in California, Minnesota, New York, and Vermont. Most notably, there was an excess of deaths due to cancer of the brain and central nervous system. Kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and breast cancer were also found in excess in some groups of workers. It was not possible to link these deaths to specific chemicals or other exposures in the workplace because the information necessary to do this was not available.

The study confirms a small mortality study of just three IBM plants published a year ago by company consultants, which also showed increased deaths due to brain and central nervous system cancer.

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Mortality among US employees of a large computer manufacturing company -- 1969-2001

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