

Wilkins Safety Group

Weekly Update Newsletter



Welcome to this issue - Friday 15th April 2011 - of our Update Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to colleagues and friends.

###

What is COSHH?



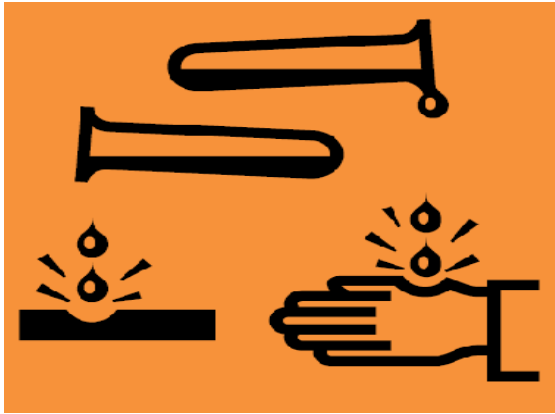
Why COSHH matters

Using chemicals or other hazardous substances at work can put people's health at risk, so the law requires employers to control exposure to hazardous substances to prevent ill health. They have to protect both employees and others who may be exposed by complying with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) (as amended).

COSHH is a useful tool of good management which sets eight basic measures that employers, and sometimes employees, must take. These are set out in full within the HSE leaflet with a simple step-by-step approach which will help you to assess risks, implement any measures needed to control exposure and establish good working practices.

If you as an employer fail to adequately control hazardous substances, your employees or others may become ill. Effects from hazardous substances range from mild eye irritation to chronic lung disease or, on occasions, death. This may:

- Result in lost productivity to your business.
- Leave you liable to enforcement action, including prosecution under the COSHH Regulations.
- Result in civil claims from your employees.



There can be positive benefits to your business from carefully following through the requirements of COSHH:

- Improved productivity as a result of using more effective controls (e.g. less use of raw material).
- Improved employee morale.
- Better employee understanding and compliance with health and safety requirements.

Hazardous substances

Hazardous substances include:

- Substances used directly in work activities (e.g. adhesives, paints, cleaning agents).
- Substances generated during work activities (e.g. fumes from soldering and welding).
- Naturally occurring substances (e.g. grain dust).
- Biological agents such as bacteria and other micro-organisms.

Where are hazardous substances found?

In nearly all work environments, for example:

- Factories
- Shops
- Mines
- Farms
- Laboratories
- Offices

Effects of hazardous substances

Examples of the effects of hazardous substances include:

- Skin irritation or dermatitis as a result of skin contact.
- Asthma as a result of developing allergy to substances used at work.
- Losing consciousness as a result of being overcome by toxic fumes.
- Cancer, which may appear long after the exposure to the chemical that caused it.
- Infection from bacteria and other micro-organisms (biological agents).
-



What is a substance hazardous to health under COSHH?

Under COSHH there are a range of substances regarded as hazardous to health:

- Substances or mixtures of substances classified as dangerous to health under the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2002 (CHIP). These can be identified by their warning label and the supplier must provide a safety data sheet for them. Many commonly used dangerous substances are listed in the HSE publication Approved Supply List. Information approved for the classification and labelling of substances and preparations dangerous for supply, as part of the CHIP package. Suppliers must decide if preparations and substances that are not in the Approved Supply List are dangerous, and if so, label them accordingly.
- Substances with workplace exposure limits are listed in the HSE publication EH40/2005 Workplace exposure limits.
- Biological agents (bacteria and other micro-organisms), if they are directly connected with the work, such as with farming, sewage treatment, or healthcare, or if the exposure is incidental to the work (e.g. exposure to bacteria from an air-conditioning system that is not properly maintained).
- Any kind of dust if its average concentration in the air exceeds the levels specified in COSHH.
- Any other substance which creates a risk to health, but which for technical reasons may not be specifically covered by CHIP including: asphyxiates (i.e. gases such as argon and helium, which, while not dangerous in themselves, can endanger life by reducing the amount of oxygen available to breathe), pesticides, medicines, cosmetics or substances produced in chemical processes.

What is not a substance hazardous to health under COSHH?

COSHH applies to virtually all substances hazardous to health except:

- Asbestos and lead, which have their own regulations.
- Substances which are hazardous only because they are:
 - Radioactive.
 - At high pressure.
 - At extreme temperatures, or
 - Have explosive or flammable properties (other regulations apply to these risks).
 - Biological agents that are outside the employer's control, e.g. catching an infection from a workmate. (If in doubt, please contact HSE for advice).

For the vast majority of commercial chemicals, the presence (or not) of a warning label will indicate whether COSHH is relevant. For example, there is no warning label on ordinary household washing-up liquid, so if it's used at work you do not have to worry about COSHH; but there is a warning label on bleach, and so COSHH does apply to its use in the workplace.

Step 1: Assess the risks

Your first step is to decide whether there is a problem with the substance(s) your company is using, or those to which your employees are incidentally exposed. This is called a Risk Assessment.

You must:

- Identify the hazardous substances present in your workplace
- Consider the risks these substances present to people's health

Identify the hazardous substances present in your workplace

Remember to think about substances which have been supplied to you; those produced by your work activity, e.g. fumes, vapours, aerosols, final products and waste materials; and those naturally or incidentally present in your workplace, e.g. infectious agents carried by farm animals.

Other sources of information which will help you identify hazardous substances are:

- Trade associations.
- Other employers in the same business.
- HSE website (www.hse.gov.uk) and HSE guidance, such as EH40/2005.
-



Workplace exposure limits

Consider the risks these substances present to people's health. Assessing the risk involves making a judgement on how likely it is that a hazardous substance will affect someone's health. You need to ask yourself:

How much of the substance is in use or produced by the work activity and how could people be exposed to it?

For supplied substances HSE has developed a generic risk assessment guide to help. It uses information on hazard, amount used and simple definitions of dustiness for solids or volatility for liquids.

The guide is called COSHH essentials: Easy steps to control chemicals. The guide also helps you with the next two steps - deciding what action you need to take to control risks and controlling exposure. As well as the published version, COSHH essentials can be found free on the Internet at: www.coshh-essentials.org.uk, where you can follow the steps quickly and easily online.

Who could be exposed to the substance and how often?

You must remember to include all groups of people who could come into contact with the substance, i.e. contractors, visitors and members of the public, as well as your employees. Do not forget those involved in cleaning and maintenance tasks - high exposures can occur during this type of work. Also, certain groups of people could suffer more from exposure than others, e.g. pregnant women, individuals with a suppressed immune system.

Is there a possibility of substances being absorbed through the skin or swallowed (e.g. as a result of a substance getting into the mouth from contaminated hands during eating or smoking)? Are there risks to your employees at other locations if they work away from your main workplace?

There is also a HSE Guidance - Working alone in safety for solitary workers away from their home base, this must be considered when completing the Lone Working Assessment.

Once everything has been considered you must complete an appropriate risk assessment for each classification item under the COSHH regulations. This includes obtaining copies of the

Manufacture Information Data Sheets [MIDS], this can be obtained from the product supplier or manufacture. The MIDS must be attached to the relevant completed risk assessment.

###

If you would like to discuss any of the issues highlighted in this newsletter, then drop an email to Jon on jon@jonwilkins.co.uk or call the office 01458 253682



Your Business is Safer
Your Business is Safer in Our Hands