

S100

COSHH essentials: Supplementary advice



The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) require employers to ensure that exposure is prevented or, where this is not reasonably practicable, adequately controlled. This guidance gives practical advice on how this can be achieved by applying the principles of good practice for the control of exposure to substances hazardous to health, as required by COSHH.

It is aimed at people whose responsibilities include the management of substances hazardous to health at work (eg occupational health specialists, anyone undertaking COSHH assessments, supervisors and is also useful for trade union and employee safety representatives). It will help you carry out COSHH assessments, review existing assessments, deliver training and supervise activities involving substances hazardous to health.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

General advice on substances causing harm via skin or eye contact

Control approach S Harm via skin or eye contact

Introduction

COSHH essentials hazard group S covers substances that can damage the skin and/or eyes, or can pass through the skin and cause disease in other parts of the body. This may be in addition to causing harm by being breathed in. Contact with skin and eyes may require control measures in addition to those for controlling inhalation exposure.

Consider how group S substances can come into contact with the skin and eyes. This can occur:

- when the skin comes into direct contact with a liquid or solid, eg by immersion;
- when dust, fumes, vapours or aerosol particles settle on the skin (whether generated as part of the work activity or incidental to it);
- by touching contaminated surfaces;
- by touching or removing contaminated clothing or gloves; or
- by splashing.

Once contamination has got onto the hands, it may be spread to other parts of the body by touch, rubbing or scratching.

Control measures

- ✓ If you are using a substance in hazard group S and it is likely to get onto your workers' skin or into eyes, consider not using it, or replacing it with one that does not fall into group S. Remember to check any replacement substance is not hazardous by inhalation.
- ✓ If you can't avoid exposure by substitution, reduce likely contact with the skin or eyes. There are a range of options:
 - Reduce contact by using engineering controls. For example, can you enclose the process more? Can you partially enclose the process and use some form of local exhaust ventilation (LEV)?
 - Apply a 'safe working distance'. For example, can you use an automated handling system, use tools for handling rather than hands or use tools that have a long handle rather than a short one?
 - Segregate clean and dirty areas and put a barrier between them to help to stop the spread of contamination.
 - Use spillage controls to reduce spread of contamination where applicable.
 - Provide smooth, impermeable surfaces that are easy to clean.

- ✓ Once these points have been addressed and any process modifications made, it is important that the work area is cleaned regularly, and rigorous procedures are put in place to deal with spillages.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- ✓ In situations where contact with substances in hazard group S is unavoidable, the use of PPE may be appropriate. However, PPE has a number of limitations:
 - It has to be selected carefully (further information on the selection of PPE is given in S101 and S102: See Essential information).
 - It may limit mobility or communication.
 - Its continued effectiveness depends on proper maintenance, training and adherence to good working practices.
- ✓ PPE should only be considered if other measures are impracticable.

Personal decontamination

- ✓ Provide warm water, mild skin cleansers, and soft paper or fabric towels for drying. Avoid abrasive cleansers.
- ✓ Provide pre-work skin creams, which will make it easier to wash dirt from the skin.
- ✓ Provide after-work creams to replenish skin oils.

Caution: 'Barrier creams' are not 'liquid gloves' and do not provide a full barrier.

Essential information

You can find the full COSHH essentials series at www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/essentials

Selecting protective gloves COSHH Guidance Sheet S101 HSE
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/s101.pdf

Selecting personal protective equipment (PPE) COSHH Guidance Sheet S102 HSE www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/s102.pdf

Further information

Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register www.oshcr.org/

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk/. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

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