



Chemical Exposure Policy and Procedure

General

Support workers will encounter a wide range of chemical/cleaning products in the workplace, from well-known proprietary brands to home-made concoctions (which may be a cocktail of brands/types of mixtures of base chemicals such as kerosene, methylated spirits or phenol).

It is essential that chemicals to be used are identified and suitable protection and/or precautions provided during use. All chemicals will have their own Safety Data Sheets. The Managing Director will be responsible for obtaining and recording this information.

Safety data sheets

Safety data sheets (SDS) are a key source of information when conducting a hazardous-chemical risk assessment or using chemicals during shifts. Safety data sheets include product identifiers, ingredients, safety information, first aid instructions, handling and transport information.

Safety data sheets must be:

- obtained from the manufacturer, importer or supplier of the hazardous chemical;
- current (within 5 years of the first supply of the hazardous chemical to the workplace or when the SDS is amended); and
- readily accessible to workers, emergency service workers and anyone likely to be exposed to the hazardous chemical.

Assessing and recording risks

Procedures:

- Chemicals, which cannot be identified, must not be used.
- Directions for use provided on containers must be read and followed.
- All warning labels attached to containers must be read.
- All SDS sheets should be sighted before the commencement of shifts.
- Prescribed concentrations must not be altered.
- Where warning labels or directions are missing from containers the product is not to be used.
- Ventilation must be provided where any product label suggests that good ventilation is necessary or where any odour is smelt.
- Adequate ventilation may require windows and doors opened and exhaust fans operating.
- Personal protection must be used to minimise exposure to chemicals.
- The issue of gloves is mandatory for tasks involving chemical use. The use of gloves is seen to be the most effective way to avoid allergic reactions or injury.

- Universal brand polyethylene disposable gloves and latex examination gloves are available from the Managing Director.
- The issue of other protective clothing and equipment must be arranged prior to work beginning.
- When managing exposure to chemicals one rule should apply in all circumstances.

Solvents

Solvents can cause injury where precautions are not taken to reduce exposures. Solvents are degreasers and may dissolve and remove natural lubricants present in the skin leading to dryness, inflammation and infection. Direct contact should be avoided at all times.

Inhalation of solvent vapours may produce headaches, dizziness or respiratory problems and it is essential that adequate ventilation be provided during use. Solvents are generally associated with an increased risk of fire/explosion and must not be used where smoking; naked flames or radiators are present.

Aerosol sprays

Aerosol sprays are in common use due to their ease of application. It must be remembered that these aerosol cans are pressure containers, pressurised with a gas, which may be flammable.

For this reason, aerosol cans must not be punctured, heated or disposed of in incinerators.

DO NOT store aerosols:

- in direct sunlight; or
- on top of or next to water heaters, stoves, ovens, open fires, or heaters.

Acids

Acids are capable of causing serious injury (skin, eyes, respiratory system) and their use for cleaning is prohibited. Strong alkaline can also cause harm and must not be used.

Chemical exposure

Chemicals may enter the body by:

- Ingestion - taken in the mouth as a result of poor hygiene or taken mistakenly. Always ensure hands are washed prior to eating or smoking following use of chemicals.
- Inhalation - fumes inhaled due to poor ventilation or use of chemicals in confined spaces, such as shower recesses or laundries.
- Absorption through the intact skin. A range of chemicals is capable of being absorbed into the body following contact with the skin.

Chemical exposure may result in:

- Asphyxiation, difficulty in breathing
- Poisoning, nausea, loss of co-ordination
- Dizziness, headaches
- Burns, localised inflammation/infection
- Allergic reaction
- Eye damage, disfigurement

If any of these conditions are suffered as a result of chemical exposure medical attention should be sought urgently.

The Poisons Information Centre can be contacted on 13 11 26.