

Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances Paper		ACTS/36/2004	
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ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

Occupational asthma caused by Isocyanates

A Paper by Donald Adey

Issue

1. To update ACTS on progress combating Occupational asthma (OA) caused by exposure to Isocyanates.

Timing

2. Routine.

Recommendation

3. To note & comment.

Background

4. Isocyanates remains the top reported cause of OA in Great Britain.
HSC has agreed a target of achieving a 30% cut in new cases of OA by the end of this decade.
The partnership Asthma Board has a plan of actions covering the overall disease.
The last board meeting, in April, received a presentation from Dr Gary Liss from the Ministry of Labour in Ontario on their achievements cutting new cases.
HSL hosted an internal workshop in April to identify the gaps in our actions to achieve the target. (Report at Annex 1).
The Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) is just about to conclude a major study on Isocyanates usage (a final report Annex 2 will be forward).

Planned Activity

5. The actions which we recommend to form our Action Plan on Isocyanates are:
 - Produce specific Topic Pack for Inspectors on Isocyanates

- Produce spray booth specification – using British Standards, Publically Available Specification route
- Encourage enhanced supplier side information provision
- Issue definitive advise on half mask or full
- Seek enhanced training qualifications for spray painting
- Consider further ‘behavioral patterns’ research
- Encourage more biological monitoring through urine sampling
- Share the IOM reports with trade/professional associations, with a strong executive summary
- Encourage further partnership activity to raise awareness and promote best practice

Link to HSC Strategy

6. To contribute to 30% cut in new cases of OA target.

Communication Plan

7. Each action proposed would be led by particular HSE section/person with partnerships being ‘engaged’ to the full.

Communications would be through existing links, with a full plan being produced.

Evaluation Plan

8. Members will be aware that it is difficult to predict concrete impacts from specific activity. However, taken as a package, the Asthma Boards activities have, along with the work of our partners, led to a continued decline in new cases for nearly all top substances, including isocyanates. (see Annex 2).

What ‘outputs’ can be hoped for from these actions, which represent what we feel are the gaps in our existing activity:

- A specific topic pack, written for both HSE and LA inspectors would make it simpler to access the technical information to tackle the inspection. Highlights to inspectors the priority we attach to the disease.
- An agreed specification through BSI standards for the construction & operation of booths would further improve the provision of new spray-painting repair ‘shops’. Should assist to further discourage ‘back street’ operations.
- The provision of enhanced supplier information from the producers of these paints would heighten the dangers from their usage.
- The confusion between ‘full’ or half mask’ persists. Definite advice should reduce the use of half mask further.
- Enhanced training qualification will drive up the safely standard within the trade.
- ‘Behavioural patterns’ research may allow us to better understand what motivates the workers to expose themselves to these risks. We can then seek to alter the behaviour.

- Urine sampling appears the simplest cost effective way of monitoring the workforce. An increase in sampling would expose new cases faster and lead to elimination of the specific problem area.
- The two reports (attached at annexes 1 & 2) should encourage our partners to give more attention to Isocyanates. Partners carrying the message to their customers etc will further encourage improvement in substitution & control.
- This type of work through the Asthma Board is already proving its worth.

Negative impact on statistics

9. The activities ongoing and planned will raise the awareness of OA yet further. Members can expect to see a rise in the number of cases being reported due to the heightened awareness, before we see a sustained 'real' decrease in statistics.

New Activity

10. Since last reported a programme of Safety Awareness Days has been launched aimed specifically at MVR Spray Painting.

Consultation

11. Detailed actions will be cleared through the Asthma Board.

The Board has looked in depth at Isocyanates exposure and gained recognition for our overall effective measures during the presentations by Dr Garry Liss from the Dept of Labour of Ontario. While we have not used new legislation to 'oblige' improvements as done in Ontario (the most populated Canadian province) Dr Liss said that our 'package' of partnership measures was having the same overall positive impact. Driving down new cases.

Costs and Benefits

12. The costs will be met from existing budgets.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

13. N/A

Environmental implications

14. N/A

European implications

15. N/A

Other implications

16. N/A

Action

17. For comment & note.

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