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COSHH essentials for printers



This information is intended to help employers in the printing industry comply with the requirements of the Control of Substances

Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH), as amended, to control exposure to chemicals and protect workers' health.

It is also useful for trade union safety representatives.

Health surveillance for occupational asthma

Supplementary advice

What is occupational asthma?

Occupational asthma is asthma that is related to work. Common symptoms include:

- recurring soreness or watering of eyes;
- recurring blocked or running nose;
- bouts of coughing;
- chest tightness;
- wheezing;
- breathlessness;
- any other persistent or history of chest problems;
- symptoms generally improving at weekends or during holidays.

These are all symptoms of sensitisation - occupational asthma may follow.

Why do I need to do health surveillance for asthma?

You are using isocyanates, which cause occupational asthma. Occupational asthma is a major occupational disease with serious implications both for affected individuals and their employers.

If you detect the first signs of a worker's sensitisation early enough and take steps to halt their exposure to isocyanate, you will minimise the risk of asthma developing.

What is health surveillance for asthma?

Surveillance is collecting and using information about workers' health and the substances used. It helps prevent asthma developing by detecting the early signs, and also keeps workers aware of the need to maintain and use controls.

Surveillance for asthma for workers using isocyanates consists of:

- assessing workers' lung function before they start a relevant job;
- ensuring a regular (at least annual) questionnaire and lung function test by an occupational doctor or nurse;
- keeping a health record;
- monitoring sickness absence.

Note: Health screening or health promotion schemes are not health surveillance.

Who needs surveillance for asthma?

Everyone working with or near isocyanates or using products labelled R42 'May cause sensitisation by inhalation' (which means may cause asthma), or R42/43 'May cause sensitisation by inhalation and skin contact'.

This does **not** include workers in offices attached to print shops.

What specialist help do I need?

Look in Yellow Pages under 'Health and safety consultants' and 'Health authorities and services' for occupational physicians (doctors and nurses). Also see www.nhsplus.nhs.uk. The occupational doctor or nurse will tell you what to do, and how. Surveillance for asthma will cost around £50 per worker for each examination.

Appoint a responsible person, supported by the doctor or nurse, for symptom reporting.

Record-keeping

Record the fact that your workers need surveillance for asthma because they are using isocyanate-based products.

Note down these products.

Also record:

- the worker's name, address and National Insurance number;
- the products they work with or the process, and how often they do this work;
- the control measures used (fume extraction, respiratory protective equipment, etc);
- the date of starting work with the products or process.

Retain these records for 40 years.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory 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 as illustrating good practice.