

# Safe use of cleaning substances in the hospitality industry

## HSE information sheet

## Catering Information Sheet No 22

### Introduction

This information sheet was produced by the Hospitality and Catering Industry Liaison Forum, which has members from trade and professional associations, unions and enforcement authorities. Members' associations are free to reproduce and distribute this guidance to catering establishments. The guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

This guidance is principally aimed at employers in the hospitality industry. It also provides advice for employees when handling hazardous substances. The industry uses many different types of hazardous cleaning substances. They include washing-up liquids, dishwasher detergents and rinse-aids, drain-cleaning products, oven cleaners, disinfectants, toilet cleaners, bleach, sanitisers and descalers.

The information sheet will be relevant to you if you or your staff use any hazardous cleaning substances. By following the guidance, you can reduce the risk of accidental injury or ill health at work.

### What are the health risks?

The most common risks are likely to be through the substances contacting the skin or eyes, breathing in or swallowing cleaning substances.

Many cleaning substances are hazardous because they are corrosive and can cause skin and eye burns if splashed onto the body. Without proper controls, some may cause dermatitis (dry, sore, flaky skin) or other skin irritations, asthma and breathing problems.

It is highly unlikely that any adult would ever think of drinking a cleaning substance intentionally, but it is still common to find food or drink containers being used to store hazardous cleaning substances. This should not be done.

Touching the face, eyes or skin after handling a cleaning substance can cause irritation, inflammation

or chemical burns.

Some substances can cause breathing problems if oversprayed, used without adequate ventilation or sprayed onto hot surfaces, eg improperly used oven cleaner.

There can also be adverse chemical reactions when substances are mixed, for example cleaning products containing bleach mixed with acidic toilet cleaners or ammonia will give off harmful gases.

Other risks include accidental splashes to the skin and eyes while cleaning substances are being poured from one container into another, or from spillages while being carried in open containers. There may also be manual handling risks if the containers are heavy or bulky (for further information see *Preventing manual handling injuries to catering staff*).

### What the law says

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) require employers to:

- **Assess** the risks from working with hazardous substances. This will include any arrangements to deal with accidents, incidents or emergencies, such as those resulting from serious spillages. The assessment must also include the health and safety risks from storing, handling or disposal of any of the substances.
- **Prevent**, or if this is not reasonably practicable, **control** the exposure to such substances.
- Provide staff with **information, instruction and training** on the risks and the precautions the employer has taken to control these risks, eg providing appropriate protective gloves or appropriate eye protection.

Employees have a duty to take reasonable care for themselves and others who may be affected by their actions and to cooperate with their employer in complying with their legal duties.

## **Guidance for employers**

### **Gather information about the substances, the work and the working practices**

- List all the hazardous substances used.
- Find out who could be exposed and how.

### **Evaluate the risks to health**

- Find out the chance of exposure occurring, how often exposure is likely to occur, what level of exposure could happen and for how long.
- Conclude what risk is posed by the existing and potential exposure.

### **Decide what needs to be done**

- Consider whether there is a need to use each substance in the first place. Stop using those that are not required.
- For each of the remaining substances and for any new cleaning substances you later consider, ask your supplier if this is the safest product available or if there is a safer alternative, which you should use if it is available. Ask your supplier if you can purchase diluted products in smaller containers that will be easier to use.
- Consider where and how the substances are used or handled. Avoid pouring from and using bulk containers, as these can be heavy and hard to hold. Minimise handling, eg by using appropriate syphons, pumps etc, smaller containers and lidded containers when carrying solutions, especially if floors are wet or slippery.
- Keep substances in their original labelled containers where possible. If decanting, ensure that the decanting containers are made of a suitable material, are clean and clearly marked with the manufacturer's instructions for use. The label should clearly identify the hazards of the substance. This will help prevent any confusion about the contents.
- Consider safe storage arrangements, which should be away from heat, sunlight, foodstuffs and members of public, especially children. Containers should all have lids and be clearly labelled. Cleaning and disinfecting substances should be securely stored. Always check manufacturers' storage instructions, as some products may need to be stored separately from others. Have procedures in place to clear up spillages.

- Make sure all your employees are informed, trained and supervised in using cleaning substances. It will not be enough just to issue safety data sheets; you must make sure your employees understand the hazards and the control measures needed to control any risks.
- Take into consideration any of your staff who do not have English as a first language. You must make sure that they clearly understand. Posters or graphics can help as reminders of how to carry out the job safely.
- Remember to consult employees and their safety representatives about health and safety issues, including using cleaning substances. They may have experienced problems or come up with solutions that may not have been considered.
- Make sure appropriate protective clothing is available when using the cleaning substance. This could include eye protection, various types of gloves, face masks and visors etc. Where mains tap water is not readily available for eye irrigation, at least a litre of sterile water or sterile normal saline (0.9%) in sealed disposable containers should be provided. Avoid latex gloves as they are known to cause reactions. Employees must be trained when and how to use and replace such protection.
- Have a procedure for employees to report adverse health effects such as skin or respiratory problems.
- Have a procedure for clearing spillages. Keep safety data sheets in a place known to staff in the event that they need to refer to them in case of a spillage or accident.
- Check first-aid arrangements. Staff should be trained in first-aid actions to take in the event of accidental contact with skin or eyes, and appropriate first-aid provision should be available, eg eyewash bottles.

### **Record the significant findings of your assessment**

If you have five or more employees you must record the significant findings of the assessment. If you have fewer than five employees you don't have to write anything down, but it is good practice to keep a record. Keeping a record will act as a reminder in future of what you did and why, and will make future reviews easier and quicker.

For all substances used, record a description of their use, eg oven cleaner, and a description of the type of hazard they represent, eg irritant/corrosive/toxic etc (you will find this on the produce safety data sheets or product labels). If you do not have this information, ask your supplier to provide it. Manufacturers and suppliers of hazardous substances are required by law to provide safety information on their products.

- Identify what jobs involve working with hazardous substances and who may be exposed.
- Record your control measures.

### **Review your assessment**

- Monitor and review your use of hazardous cleaning substances.
- Supervisors should observe that they are being used and stored correctly.
- Train new employees.

### **Guidance for employees**

- Always follow carefully any instructions and training information given in using cleaning substances.
- Remember that your safety representative and you as an employee are entitled to be consulted by your employer about health and safety issues, including the use of cleaning substances.
- When handling substances, especially concentrates (if unavoidable), always wear the protective clothing provided. If there is any danger of splashing, wear eye protection suitable for splash risks, eg goggles or visors. If cleaning at eye level or above, wear eye protection.
- Check that rubber gloves are free from holes, tears or thin patches. If any of these faults are present, ask for replacements immediately. Tell your employer if you experience any irritation or allergy from gloves you have used.
- Never mix cleaning substances.
- When diluting, always add the concentrated liquid to water, not the water to the concentrate.
- If you accidentally splash cleaning substances onto your skin or eyes, always wash away with plenty of water. Seek medical advice if irritation persists and tell your employer.
- Avoid lifting and pouring from heavy or awkward bulk containers. Minimise handling by using syphons, pumps etc.

- If you are dispensing powders, always use a scoop. Never use your hand.
- Never transfer cleaning substances into food or drink containers where they can easily be mistaken for foodstuffs. Ensure spray bottles and other containers are clearly marked with their contents.
- If you use aerosols for cleaning, never spray them onto hot surfaces as this can produce harmful vapours. Never place aerosols on hot surfaces.
- Only use cleaning substances in well-ventilated areas. Sometimes an open window will be enough. If there is mechanical ventilation, make sure it is switched on and working properly. You may also need to wear a suitable fume mask and goggles, depending on the manufacturer's instructions.
- Always clean up any spills on floors or work surfaces immediately.
- Always store substances as manufacturers advise, for example away from heat, sunlight, foodstuffs and members of the public, especially children.
- Make sure substances are disposed of properly, as instructed by your employer and following the information given in the safety data sheet.
- Let your supervisor or manager and safety representative know immediately if you experience any adverse reactions to substances, for example headaches, nausea, skin complaints.

### **Further reading**

*Preventing manual handling injuries to catering staff*  
Catering Information Sheet CAIS24(rev2) HSE 2017  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais24.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais24.htm)

In particular you may wish to visit Health and safety made simple: The basics for your business ([www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index.htm)) and the catering and hospitality webpages ([www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm)) which also includes some case studies.

Further information on COSHH, including a web-based tool to help you control the risks, is available at [www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm).

## Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk). HSE's website provides information, as well as a number of free leaflets and information sheets, that will be useful to help manage risks and comply with legal requirements. You can order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

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.

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