General advice

Chemicals causing harm via skin or eye contact

S100

The guidance in this sheet is aimed at employers **and the** self-employed **to help them comply with the requirements of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH), by controlling exposure to chemicals and protecting workers' health.**

The sheet is part of the HSE guidance pack *COSHH essentials: easy steps to control chemicals*. It can be used alongside control approaches 1-4 where the guidance allocates a chemical to hazard group S ie where chemicals can cause harm in contact with skin and eyes.

This sheet provides general advice on the factors you need to consider for a substance allocated to hazard group S. It describes the key points you need to follow to provide adequate control and to help ensure exposure is reduced to an acceptable level. Other sheets in the S series provide additional help on specific issues related to substances in group S.

Some chemicals can also be flammable or corrosive. Control equipment must be suitable for these hazards too. Look at the safety data sheet for more information.

Depending on the scale of work, releases into the atmosphere may be regulated within the pollution prevention and control (PPC) framework. You should consult your local authority or the Environment Agency. In Scotland, consult the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). They will advise you if PPC legislation applies to your company, and about air cleaning and discharging emissions into the air. Otherwise, minimise emissions into the air.

Contact with skin and eyes

Group S covers substances that can damage the skin and/or eyes, or enter the body through the skin and cause harm. This may be in addition to causing harm by being breathed in. Contact with skin and eyes can be a particularly problematic type of exposure, and controls in addition to those in guidance sheets in the 100, 200 and 300 series may be needed.

You need to consider how group S chemicals 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 or vapours/spray particles settle on the skin. The dust or vapour may be generated as part of the work activity or may be incidental to it;
- by touching dirty surfaces;
- by touching or removing dirty clothing or gloves;
- by splashing or swallowing.

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

Control measures

If you are using a chemical in hazard group S and it is likely to get onto your workers' skin or eyes, you need to consider not using it, or replacing it with one that does not fall into group S. But remember to check any replacement substance is not in a higher inhalation hazard group.

If you can't avoid exposure this way, by substitution, you will need to reduce likely contact with the skin or eyes. There is a range of options you can use:

- Can the substance be contained more? For example, a control approach 2 solution will provide more containment and less exposure than a control approach 1 solution.
- Can you modify the process to minimise handling operations or use remote handling?
- Can you segregate clean and dirty areas and put a barrier between them? This will help to stop the spread of contamination.
- Can you provide smooth, impermeable surfaces that are easy to clean?

Once these questions have been answered 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. Good washing facilities also need to be provided. Workers should wash their hands before and after eating, drinking and using the lavatory.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

In situations where contact with chemicals in hazard group S is unavoidable, the use of personal protective equipment 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 CGS S101);
- it may limit mobility or communication;
- its continued effectiveness depends on proper maintenance, training and adherence to good working practices.

It should only be considered if other measures are impracticable.

HSE

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