

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH): Employee Factsheet

What is a hazardous substance?

Substances (including chemicals) may be hazardous in various forms if they enter the body as they can then cause harm, for example:

- Dusty or fume-laden air can cause lung diseases, e.g. in welders, quarry workers or woodworkers
- Metalworking fluids can grow bacteria and fungi which cause dermatitis and asthma
- Flowers, bulbs, fruit and vegetables can cause dermatitis
- Wet working, e.g. catering and cleaning, can cause dermatitis
- Benzene in crude oil can cause leukaemia
- Exposure to certain sensitising agents can cause asthma.

Many other products or substances used at work can be harmful, such as paint, ink, glue, lubricant, detergent and beauty products.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) (COSHH) is the key piece of legislation regarding exposure to various categories of hazardous substances used in the workplace. There is a requirement under COSHH to assess any work involving a hazardous substance before the commencement of work and implement adequate controls to minimise or eliminate the risk. This is particularly vital for particularly hazardous materials such as:

- Carcinogens (cancer causing materials causing such as Benzene and asbestos)
- Asthmagens which may cause occupational asthma
- Substances which can cause damage to the unborn child or damage to genetic material.

Identifying the risk:

- Does your work involve the use of hazardous substances?
- Are you aware of the safety data sheets and COSHH Assessments which have been carried out by your employer?
- Are you aware of the measures your employer has put in place to protect you, including ventilation and the use of PPE?
- Do you suffer from ill health which you feel may be attributable to the substances you are using (e.g. dermatitis or asthma)?
- Are you pregnant or planning to have a family in the near future?

Did you know?

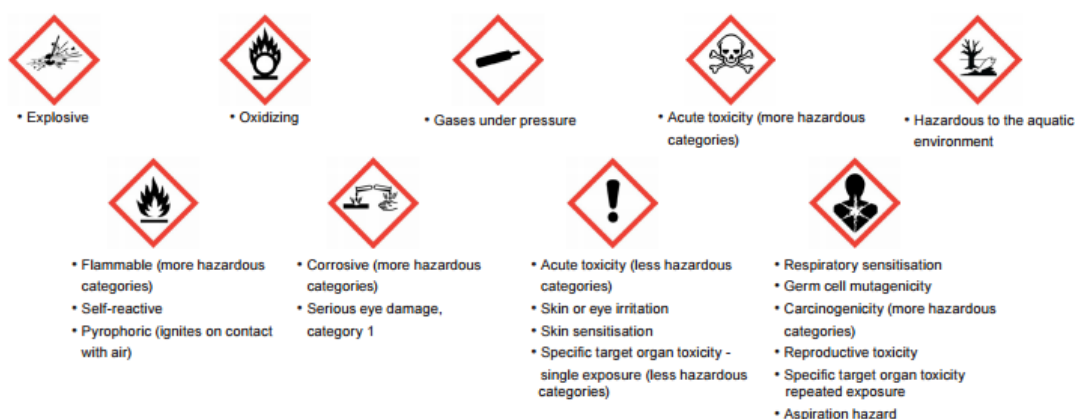
- Ill health caused by substances including chemicals and dusts cause around 10,000 deaths per year.
- There are over 1,000 new cases of occupational dermatitis per year.

Controlling risk:

- Attend training/toolbox talks which will help you recognise any symptoms
- Report symptoms as early as possible to your supervisor and seek medical advice as soon as possible
- Co-operate with your employer when measures of prevention or control have been put in place to protect you, including the use of PPE and if the measures put in place following assessment are not working, report it.

Hazardous substances carry information on the labels and this includes pictograms and warnings.

The pictograms are below.



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