

COSHH - Chemicals and Substances – Toolbox Talk

Reason

Hazardous substances can be used in, or created by, work processes.

This talk will cover: COSHH assessment, hazards, control measures and safe use of substances.

Why is it important

Ignore a hazardous substance today and you may wish you hadn't by tomorrow. Most businesses use substances, or products that are mixtures of substances. Some processes create substances. These could cause harm to employees, contractors and other people. Sometimes substances are easily recognised as harmful. Common substances such as paint, bleach or dust from natural materials may also be harmful.

COSHH Assessment

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

1. Management must carry out a Coshh assessment to find out whether:
 - a. Exposure to a substance can be eliminated?
 - b. Alternative work methods to try and reduce exposure?
 - c. A less hazardous substance can be used?
2. Any substance with a hazard warning label has the potential to cause harm - assess the risk before using it.
3. Your employer has a legal duty to assess the risk involved in working with a hazardous substance, decide what precautions should be taken to deal with the risk and to instruct you on what precautions must be taken.

Make sure you understand these instructions before you work with any hazardous substance, get the COSHH assessment.

Question: Before using a substance, what should you consider?

What is a hazardous substance?

- Any preparation (mixture) that is dangerous for supply, and for which an indication of danger specified for the substance is very toxic, toxic, harmful, corrosive or irritant.
- Any substance which has a Workplace Exposure Limit (WEL).
- Any biological agents used at work.
- Any dust other than one with a WEL at a concentration in air above 10 mg/m³ averaged over 8 hours, or any such respirable dust above 4 mg/m³ over 8 hours.
- Any other substance that creates a risk to health because of its properties and the way it is used or is present in the workplace.

Hazards:

1. How you could be affected by a hazardous substance:
 - a. Ingestion - eating contaminated food
 - b. Inhalation - breathing harmful dust or fumes.
 - c. Absorption - chemicals entering through skin, cuts, etc.
 - d.
2. Examples of hazardous substances on construction sites:
 - a. Contaminated ground
 - b. Concrete ad-mixtures
 - c. Cement
 - d. Hard wood dust
 - e. Resins
 - f. Epoxy-based paints
 - g. Welding fumes
 - h. Asbestos
3. Don't mix chemicals or substances unless they are specifically intended to be mixed together, such as some adhesives.

Question: Name the three ways a substance can enter your body?

Control Measures:

1. When using hazardous substances, wear the correct PPE.
2. Know how to look after and use PPE correctly.
3. Know where washing and first-aid facilities are on site.
4. Ensure hazardous substances are put back into a secure location after use and not left out on site.
5. Provide control measures to reduce harm to health, e.g. extraction.
6. Providing information, instruction and training for employees and others
7. Provide monitoring and health surveillance in appropriate cases
8. Plan for emergencies

Question: Where should substances be put at the end of a shift?

Use of Substances:

1. Make sure you are trained to use hazardous substances.
2. Read and comply with the information on the Coshh assessment and the instructions on the product label.
3. Don't eat, drink or smoke when handling substances.
4. Don't expose workers to fumes, dust, gas or other dangers from hazardous substances caused or required due to the work being done.
5. Always wash hands and face at the end of each shift and before eating.

Storage:

- Some chemicals can become unstable when old and explosions can result if these are mishandled. Check the condition of all containers for indications of leaks, swelling, or age (e.g. rust).
- Store in accordance with packaging instructions.

- Some chemicals must not be stored next to others – check the label.

Question: Where can you obtain information about the hazardous substance you are using?

Question: What can you wear to protect against substances?

Question: Name five hazardous substances you may find on site.

REMEMBER KNOW WHAT PPE TO WEAR TO PROTECT AGAINST THE HAZARD

