

TOOLBOX TALK

COSHH toolbox talk

About seven minutes · COSHH Regulations 2002

SITE

DATE

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WHY IT MATTERS

Work causes or makes worse an estimated 6,000 new cases of skin problems in Great Britain every year. Most of the cases dermatologists see are contact dermatitis, and the commonest causes are soaps, cleaners and wet work. On site, add cement, resins and solvents. Breathing problems from dust and fume add to that. None of it shows up on the day. It builds over weeks and years, and by the time a hand cracks and bleeds or a chest tightens on the stairs, the damage is often permanent.

Nobody sets out to ruin their hands or their lungs. It happens because the gloves were in the van, the tin was open all afternoon, the extraction was not plugged in, or lunch was eaten with cement on the fingers. This talk is about the few habits that stop that.

HSE, Work-related skin disease statistics, 2025

THE POINTS TO MAKE

- ☐ **COSHH is wider than the tin**
A hazardous substance is anything that can harm your health: a product with a hazard symbol, but also the dust from cutting blocks, the fume from welding or hot bitumen, the mist from spraying, the vapour from solvents, and dirty water and sewage. If the job makes it, COSHH covers it. Asbestos and lead are handled under their own rules.
- ☐ **The safety data sheet**
Every hazardous product comes with a safety data sheet from the supplier. It gives the hazards, the first aid, the protective equipment, the storage and the spill advice. It is on site, in the folder or on the phone, and you can ask for it at any time. It is information for the assessment, not the assessment itself.
- ☐ **Controls in order**
The law puts the choices in order. Can we do without the substance, or use a safer one: ready-mixed mortar, a water-based product, a pre-cut block? If not, enclose the process, extract at source with on-tool extraction or ventilation, and cut the time and the number of people near it. Gloves, masks and goggles come last, on top of everything else, not instead of it.
- ☐ **Storage and decanting**
Products stay in their own labelled container with the lid on when not in use. If you decant, the new container is labelled with the name and the hazard, never a drinks bottle or an unmarked tub. Flammables go back in the store, away from heat and ignition. Nothing hazardous is left where the public or children could reach it.
- ☐ **Read the label first**
The red diamonds on the label are the warning. The corrosion symbol means it burns skin and eyes. The exclamation mark means it irritates or causes an allergic reaction. The figure with a starburst in the chest means long-term harm such as asthma or cancer. The flame means it catches fire. The words next to them say what to wear and what to do if it goes wrong.
- ☐ **The COSHH assessment is the method**
Before the job starts somebody has written down what the substance is, how you could be exposed, for how long, and what controls bring that down to a safe level. That assessment is what we are briefing now. If the product changes, the quantity changes or the job moves indoors, the assessment is looked at again before you carry on.
- ☐ **Skin: dermatitis and cement burns**
Wet cement is strongly alkaline. Trapped in a glove, a boot or a trouser leg you kneel in, it can burn or ulcerate quickly. Solvents and cleaners strip the skin until it cracks. Waterproof gloves made for alkalis, long enough, dry inside, changed when contaminated. Anything on skin comes off as soon as possible with water; cement in the eye goes to the eyewash. Skin cream is not a glove.
- ☐ **Spills, and washing before you eat**
A spill is dealt with the way the data sheet says, with the spill kit, not with a rag and a hope. Big spill, unknown product or fumes building up: get out, keep others out and tell the supervisor. Hands and face are washed with soap and water before eating, drinking, smoking or going home, and washing water, soap and towels are provided on this site.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

COSHH toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Read the label and ask for the safety data sheet before using a product for the first time.
- Use the safer product or the ready-made version where the method statement gives one.
- Plug in and check the extraction before you start, and keep it running until the dust or fume has cleared.
- Wear the gloves and mask named in the COSHH assessment, and change gloves that are wet or contaminated inside.
- Wash cement, resin or chemical off skin straight away, and wash hands before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Check your hands for redness, dryness or cracking and report it early.
- Report leaking containers, missing labels, blocked extraction and spills the same day.

DO NOT

- Do not pour any substance into a drinks bottle, food tub or unmarked container.
- Do not kneel in wet concrete or mortar, or let it sit inside a glove or a boot.
- Do not use solvent, thinners or diesel to clean your hands.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke where substances are used or stored, or with unwashed hands.
- Do not mix products together unless the data sheet and the assessment say you can.
- Do not rely on a mask or gloves on their own when the method calls for extraction or a safer product.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Which products on this job today carry a hazard symbol, and what does each symbol mean?
- ? Where are the safety data sheets and the COSHH assessments for this site?
- ? What dust, fume or mist does our own work make, and what is taking it away?
- ? What gloves does the assessment ask for on this task, and where are the spares?
- ? If a tin went over in the store, what would you do first?

TO CLOSE

Nobody wrecks their hands or their lungs on purpose. It happens because the tin was handy, the gloves were in the van, the extraction was in the other room, or lunch was eaten with cement on the fingers. The label tells you what the product does, the assessment tells you how we handle it, and washing is the last line every time. If you do not know what something is or what to wear for it, stop and ask, and we will find out together.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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COSHH toolbox talk: given and understood

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MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

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