

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

Introduction

COSHH is the law that requires employers to control substances that are hazardous to health. You can prevent or reduce worker's exposure to hazardous substances by:

- Find out what the health hazards are
- Decide how to prevent harm to health with a risk assessment
- Provide control measures to reduce harm to health
- Make sure they are used
- Keep all control measures in good working order
- Provide information, instruction and training for employees and others
- Provide monitoring and health surveillance in appropriate cases
- Plan for emergencies

You may use substances and products that are mixtures of substances and some processes create substances. These could cause harm to personnel, contractors and other people. Sometimes substances are easily seen as harmful, but some common substances (eg paint, bleach or dust from natural materials) may also be harmful.

Substances hazardous to health

COSHH covers chemicals, products containing chemicals, fumes, dusts, vapours, mists and gases. If the packaging has any of the hazard symbols, then it is classed as a hazardous substance. COSHH also covers asphyxiating gases and germs that cause diseases (eg leptospirosis or legionnaires disease).

COSHH doesn't cover lead, asbestos or radioactive substances because they have their own specific regulations.

COSHH considerations

- What you do that involves hazardous substances and how these can cause harm
- How you can reduce the risk of harm occurring (always try to prevent exposure at source)
- If you can't prevent exposure, control it 'adequately' by applying the principles of good control practice
- Control is adequate when the risk of harm is as low as is reasonably practicable
- All control measures are in good working order
- Exposures are below the Workplace Exposure Limit (WEL) where one exists
- Exposure to substances that cause cancer, asthma or genetic damage are reduced as low as possible

COSHH assessment

A COSHH assessment concentrates on the hazards and risks from substances in our workplace, remembering that hazards and risks are not limited to substances labelled as 'hazardous'. The following steps have been taken during our assessment:

- Where is there a potential for exposure to substances that might be hazardous to health
- In what way are the substances harmful to health
- What jobs or tasks lead to exposure?
- Are there any areas of concern (eg from the Accident Book)?

Safety data sheets provide information on substances that are 'dangerous for supply'. Other substances should have instructions for safe use from suppliers and manufacturers). By law, our supplier must give us an up to date safety data

sheet for a substance that is 'dangerous for supply', but keeping a copy of the safety data sheet is not a COSHH assessment.

Workplace Exposure Limits (WELs)

Exposure to a substance is uptake into the body with exposure routes being breathing fume, dust, gas or mist; skin contact; injection into the skin or swallowing. Many thousands of substances are used at work but only about 500 substances have Workplace Exposure Limits (WELs).

Data sheets

Safety data sheets provide information on chemical products that help us to make a risk assessment. They describe the hazards the chemical presents and give information on handling, storage and emergency measures in case of accident. Safety data sheet information may lead to guidance appropriate for the task. All safety data sheets must contain information set out under sixteen headings. The most important information is under the following sections:

- Section 8 exposure controls and protection
- Section 9 (if a liquid) its boiling point or initial boiling point
- Section 15 the risk or hazard statements that describe the hazards
- For emergencies, sections 4, 5 and 6 may contain useful information

If information is missing from a data sheet you must contact the supplier (contact details are in section 1 of the data sheet). A safety data sheet is not a risk assessment. You must use the information it contains to help make your own assessment. As well as receiving chemicals you may supply them to others. If you do, pass on information (as safety data sheets) to those whom you supply.

Control measures and equipment

Control equipment can be general ventilation, extraction systems such as local exhaust ventilation, enclosure or where the air cannot be cleaned, refuges and respiratory protective equipment. Other control equipment includes spillage capture, decontamination, clean-up procedures and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Control through ways of working includes operating procedures, supervision and training. This includes emergency procedures, decontamination and permits to work for tasks such as maintenance. It also means testing all control measures (equipment, ways of working and behaviour) regularly to make sure that they work properly. You must keep records of examinations, tests and repairs to

equipment for at least five years. This helps to identify any trends or variations in equipment deterioration.

Where control measures are in place it is important to use them properly. This includes:

- Wearing any PPE necessary
- Using control equipment
- Following hygiene procedures
- Warning site and project managers if anything appears to be wrong

You are responsible for providing, replacing and paying for personal protective equipment. PPE should be used when all other measures are inadequate to control exposure. It protects only the wearer, while being worn. If it fails, PPE offers no protection at all. Types of PPE include respirators, protective gloves, protective clothing, protective footwear and eye protection. It is important that personnel know why they need PPE and are trained to use it correctly. Otherwise it is unlikely to protect as required.

Monitoring

Monitoring is appropriate when you need to show compliance with WELs or when you need to show that control equipment or PPE is working well enough. Monitoring can also indicate the spread of contamination and personal air monitoring measures to establish how much of a substance personnel inhales.

COSHH health surveillance

Health surveillance is any activity which involves obtaining information about personnel's health and which assists in protecting employees from health risks at work. The objectives for health surveillance are:

- Protection of health of personnel by early detection of adverse changes or disease
- Collection of data for detecting or evaluating health hazards
- Evaluation of control measures

It should not be confused with general health screening or health promotion. Health surveillance is necessary when there is a disease associated with the substance in use. Health surveillance is a process. It may be a regular planned assessment of one or more aspects of a personnel's health. However, it is not enough to simply carry out suitable tests, questionnaires or examinations. Personnel must then have the results interpreted and take action to eliminate or further control exposure. It may be necessary to redeploy affected workers if necessary.

COSHH checklist:

- Is there a health risk problem or a need for occupational health input in the workplace?
- What is needed control the risk
- Provide information, training and instruction for personnel working with substances hazardous to health
- Personnel should have access to safety data sheets
- Keep personnel informed about planned future changes in processes or substances used
- When a contractor comes on site they need to know what the risks are and how you are controlling them (and you need to know if they are bringing hazardous substances onto our premises/site and how they will prevent harm to our personnel)
- Keep basic training records

Emergencies

You must plan and practice to cope with foreseeable accidents, incidents or emergencies. This means having the right:

- Equipment to deal with the emergency including protective equipment and decontamination products
- Procedures to deal with a casualty
- People trained to take action
- Arrangements to deal with the waste created
- Information available to the emergency services

Self-employed

If you have employees (ie you control their work) every part of COSHH applies. If you have no employees, but you take hazardous substances to other peoples' premises, all regulations apply except those about monitoring and health surveillance.

References

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