

## **THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CONTROL OF SUBSTANCES HAZARDOUS TO HEALTH REGULATIONS 2002 (COSHH)**

### **ILL HEALTH AND HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES AT WORK**

Every year exposure to hazardous substances at work affects the health of many thousands of people. The results can be discomfort, pain, time off work and, all too often, premature retirement and early death. Some common examples are:

- long-term disability from lung diseases following years of work in dusty conditions
- skin irritation, dermatitis or skin cancer from frequent contact with oils
- asthma resulting from sensitisation to isocyanates in paints or adhesives

Apart from the pain and suffering, there is also a high economic price to be paid for all this occupational ill health. The workers and their families lose earnings. Employers lose money from reduced productivity and lost production. Accidents cause disruption. Prosecution and civil actions can be very expensive. The nation as a whole has to pay for the sickness benefit and National Health Service care involved.

### **THE COSHH REGULATIONS**

The COSHH Regulations provide a framework to help you protect people in your workplace against health risks from hazardous substances. They can be found in all sorts of work environments – offices, shops, swimming pools etc. – and unless the right precautions are taken, they can threaten the health of workers and others exposed to them.

All employers have to consider how COSHH will apply to their work. Many will be able to comply with the Regulations with little effort. Others whose work creates greater risks will have more to do. This leaflet will help you decide what your next steps should be.

### **HAZARD AND RISK**

The words *hazard* and *risk* are used a lot in this leaflet. They have special meanings in regulations and guidance about substances at work. The differences between them is important

#### **Hazard**

The hazard presented by a substance is its potential to cause harm. It may make you cough, damage your liver or even kill you! Some substances can harm you in several different ways: you may breathe them in, swallow them or get them on your skin.

#### **Risk**

The risk from a substance is the likelihood that it will harm you in the actual circumstances of use. This will depend on:

- the hazard presented by the substance,
- how it is used'
- how exposure to it is controlled,
- how much of the substance you are exposed to and for how long,
- whether you are particularly vulnerable to it,
- the work you are doing, and so on.

## WHAT COSHH REQUIRES

Complying with COSHH involves:

- **assessing the risks** to health arising from your work;
- **deciding what precautions are needed.** You must not carry out any work which could expose employees to hazardous substances unless you have assessed both the risks and the necessary precautions. Unless you have judged the risk correctly, you are unlikely to decide on the right precautions. This leaflet outlines a step-by-step approach – identifying the hazards, weighing up the risks arising from them and deciding what further action you need to take if the risks are significant;
- **preventing or controlling** the risks. The advice in this leaflet, and in the other guidance it refers to, will help you get the assessment right, but remember that even a perfect assessment achieves nothing unless its conclusions are put into practice;
- **ensuring that control measures are used and maintained** properly, and that any safety procedures that have been laid down are followed;
- **monitoring exposure** of workers to hazardous substances and carrying out appropriate **health surveillance** where necessary;
- **informing, instructing and training** employees about the risks and the precautions needed.

## ASSESSMENT

This is an essential requirement for all employers. You need to tackle it step by step. First look at the work to see what hazards there are. Then evaluate the risks to people and, where there *are* significant risks, decide on the action needed to remove or reduce them to insignificant levels.

## THE HAZARDS

### What is a substance hazardous to health

For the purposes of COSHH, substances hazardous to health include:

- substances or preparations listed as very toxic, toxic, harmful, irritant or corrosive
- harmful micro-organisms
- dusts of any kind in substantial concentrations
- any other substances creating comparable hazards.

### What hazardous substances are present?

The assessment must check for hazardous substances which are:

- brought into the workplace to be used, worked on or stored
- given off as fumes or vapours, or likely to leak or be spilled, during any process or work activity
- produced at the end of any work or process, as finished products, waste or residues.
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## **How can hazardous substances be identified?**

For substances brought into the workplace, check the safety information your suppliers are required by law to include on labels and hazard data sheets. But assessment for COSHH requires more than just reproducing this information – you must draw conclusions from it that are relevant to the way you use it in your workplace.

## **THE RISKS**

### **Are there significant risks from hazardous substances?**

Could any hazardous substances in your workplace present a real risk to people's health – now, in the future, or in a foreseeable emergency? Look at:

- where and how they are used, handled, generated, released etc;
- who might be affected (e.g. employees, contractors, the public);
- whether such exposure would involve substances being breathed in, swallowed (e.g. following contamination of fingers etc.) or absorbed through the skin;
- whether it is reasonably foreseeable that accidental leakage, spillage or release could occur.

Reach conclusions about the real risks to people's health from the information you have gathered and your knowledge of the potential of the substance for causing harm. Even if you conclude there is no significant risk, you may need to record this information to back up your decision.

## **WHAT FURTHER ACTION MUST YOU TAKE?**

If you have concluded that there is no likelihood of risk to health, the assessment is complete and no further action is needed (until you review the assessment). If you conclude that there are risks to health, you have to decide what else you need to do to comply fully with the Regulations.

### **Prevention**

- changing the process or activity so that the hazardous substance is not required or generated, or
- replacing it with a safer alternative, or
- using it in a safer form, for example pellets instead of powder.

### **Control**

If prevention is not reasonably practicable, you must adequately control exposure by a combination of the following:

- total enclosure of the process
- partial enclosure and extraction equipment
- general ventilation
- using systems of work and handling procedures which minimise the chances of spills, leaks and other escape of hazardous materials.

If, and only if, you cannot adequately control exposure by any combination of the measures above, you should also provide person protective equipment (e.g. respirators, protective clothing).

## **Maintenance, examination and testing of control measures**

COSHH places specific duties on employers to ensure that controls are kept in efficient working order and good repair. Engineering controls and respiratory protective equipment have to be examined and, where appropriate, tested at suitable intervals.

## **Monitoring exposure**

COSHH requires that the exposure of workers to hazardous substances should be monitored in certain cases.

## **RECORDING AND REVIEWING THE ASSESSMENT**

If you have five or more employees, you must put the assessment in writing and an example of an assessment record sheet can be found at the end of this leaflet. Include sufficient information to show how decisions about risks and precautions were arrived at and make it clear to your employees and other what parts they have to play in the precautions.

For businesses with less than five employees, an assessment must still be carried out but does not have to be recorded – In such circumstances, the hazard data sheets must be available and brought to the attention of all staff who may be exposed to the hazardous substances.

You should review the assessment regularly, at not less than five-yearly intervals, and in any case whenever there is reason to believe that it is no longer valid or where there has been a significant change in the work. You should say in the assessment when you next intend to review it.

## **TRAINING EMPLOYEES**

COSHH requires you to inform, instruct and train your employees about:

- the nature of the substances they work with and the risks created by exposure to those substances
- the precautions they should take.

You should give them sufficient information and instruction on:

- control measures, their purpose and how to use them
- how to use personal protective equipment and clothing provided
- results of any exposure monitoring and health surveillance (without giving people's names)
- emergency procedures.

These are very important duties that sometimes get overlooked. It is no use assessing the risks yourself without making sure your employees understand them too. Control measures cannot be effective if workers do not know how to use them properly.

## **ADVICE AND INFORMATION**

This leaflet is produced by the Environmental Health and Safety Section's Commercial Team using material published by the HSE. You can contact us for further advice on (01344) 352000.

**Assessment in accordance with the  
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002  
for the substance**

Substance trade name:
Use of Substance:
Supplier name address and telephone number:
Primary ingredients:
Formulation
Hazard Summary: Harmful/Irritant/Flammable/Toxic/Corrosive/Oxidising/Explosive/Other (specify)
Toxicity: By Inhalation/Ingestion/Skin and eye contact/Other (specify)
Precautions
Protective Clothing (specify type): Gloves/Overall/Goggles/Mask/Breathing Equipment/Other (specify)
First aid requirements:

Storage procedures
Procedures for use:
Assessment of Risks
Disposal Procedure
Spillage Procedure:
Control Methods to be used:
Emergency Procedures
Date of Next Assessment:
Full Name (printed) and Signature of Assessor:
Date