



Working with Hazardous Substances

Guide to Preventing Exposure to Harmful Substances

Version – January 2021

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Introduction

Based on HSE advice, this guidance sets out provides an overview of some of the key steps to take to prevent exposure to harmful substances.

It suggests that one of the most common and serious risks to the health and safety of people at work is exposure to hazardous substances. Whether it be skin damage from repeated contact with chemicals, or serious and fatal lung diseases caused by inhaling harmful dusts, gases, fumes and vapours, it is clear hazardous substances can cause immense harm to workers' health.

However, the risk of workers suffering ill health from hazardous substances – and any associated safety dangers such as fires and explosions – can be eliminated or controlled, says the guidance, providing employers carefully assess the risks and implement suitable precautions to prevent or adequately control exposure.

A wide range of workers are potentially at risk of ill health due to exposure to hazardous substances, including:

- **Cleaners and catering staff** – who may come into contact with solvents found in cleaning materials.
- **Engineering workers** – who can inhale fumes, dusts and gases during tasks such as welding, soldering, cutting, abrasive blasting and machining metals; and can suffer skin damage from contact with substance such as lubricants, adhesives, degreasers and metalworking fluids.
- **Construction workers** – who can be exposed to harmful airborne substances, such as silica dust from cutting concrete, bricks and mortar; asbestos fibres present in buildings; fumes from epoxy resins and solvent vapour from some paints, thinners and glues; and skin exposure to harmful substances, such as wet cement, degreasers, bitumen and solvents in some paints and glues.
- **Woodworkers, such as carpenters and joiners** – who can breathe in or suffer skin exposure to substances such as wood dusts, adhesives and varnishes.
- **Beauticians** – who can suffer dermatitis from skin contact with solvents in nail varnish removers, and chest wheezing, chest tightness and asthma from inhaling dust filings from artificial nails, for example.
- **Bakers** – who can inhale flour dust, or dusts from ingredients such as soya.



Exposure to hazardous substances can occur in a number of ways, including by breathing them in – when the substances then attack the nose, throat or lungs. Once breathed in, the substances can also pass from the lungs into the bloodstream and onto other tissues and organs in the body, causing damage elsewhere, such as to the liver.

The guidance covers areas including:

- assessing the risks
- controlling exposure
- control measures
- personal protective equipment
- information and training
- monitoring and surveillance
- consultation and review
- skin problems
- flammable substances.

To view the full document please follow this link:

<https://bfff.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/working-with-dangerous-substances.pdf>



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VAT Reg. No. GB 115 5466 23

