

HEALTH & SAFETY INFORMATION SHEET 13

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

It is now illegal to use hazardous substances at work if a COSHH assessment has not been carried out (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002). In all but the simplest situations a **written assessment** will be needed.

The following stages are involved:

1. List all hazardous substances

- * Make an inventory of all hazardous substances stored, used or produced by your work. This should list what is stored or produced, in what form, in what quantities and where.
- * Look for hazard symbols which classify the substance as very toxic, toxic, corrosive, harmful or irritant. Check up on unmarked or unclearly marked containers which you suspect may contain hazardous contents.
- * Include dusts, fumes or by-products which have exposure limits. (Contact your Enforcement Authority for further information).

2. Find out more about their hazardous nature

- * Obtain hazard data sheets from product suppliers. These will provide more information on the products` hazards, conditions of use and some emergency advice. Suppliers will provide data sheets free of charge.
- * Contact HSE or Local Environmental Health Authority for further advice.

3. How are these substances used?

- * Examine the work process carefully. Some areas you may need to look at are: Delivery & storage; Preparation & use; Other activities taking place nearby (eg. cleaning, maintenance, eating, smoking etc); Disposal of residues & containers; Unplanned events & emergencies.

4. What are the risks of injury or ill-health?

- * From your knowledge of the substance, the work process and foreseeable emergencies, decide what the chances are of somebody being injured or suffering from health effects and how this could occur. Only significant risks need to be considered.
- * Risks could arise from a number of sources, for example: spillages & splashes mixing incompatible substances; breathing dusts and vapours; absorption through skin contact with the substance; accidental ingestion.

- * Consider who is at risk. Include third parties such as visitors, public & contractors on your premises in addition to your staff. Also consider your neighbours. The length of exposure is also important.

5. Decide on the precautions needed

- * The easiest way to remove the risk from a hazardous substance is to stop using it (elimination) or replace it with another less harmful product (substitution).
- * Consider removing those at risk from the substance (enclosure & isolation) or extracting the dusts and fumes from the work area (dilution and local exhaust ventilation).
- * As a last resort direct protection of the worker should be considered (Personal Protective Equipment).
- * All these precautions are known as Controls and you must ensure that they are being used properly and monitor and maintain their effectiveness. In some cases, health surveillance must be considered, but this is only in special cases.

6. Record your assessment

- * Unless the assessment is simple and you can recall and explain its conclusions at any time, you should put it in writing. The assessment should clearly lay out who is at risk and why, and what precautions are in place to reduce the risks to a reasonable level.

7. Instruct and train your staff

- * It is no use assessing the risks yourself without making sure your employees understand them too. Staff need to be told about the hazardous nature of the substances they are working with and any risks to which they may be exposed.
- * Instruction and training must be given on any precautions which must be taken; control measures and their correct use; and what protective equipment or clothing is needed and how it should be properly used.
- * Training on Emergency Procedures must also be given to staff.
- * Remember to keep records on who has been trained and when.

8. Review your assessment

- * You need to review the assessment on a regular basis (not less than 5 yearly intervals). The assessment must also be reviewed if there is a change in product or process. The assessment should state when it is to be reviewed next.

For more detailed free information visit www.hse.gov.uk

