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# Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

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## Did you know that...

The aim of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002 is to protect people against risks to health, both immediate and long term, from any exposure to substances found in the workplace.

### Relevant Legislation

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 lay down the essential requirements and a sensible approach for the control of substances hazardous to health.

The keystone of the Regulations is the requirement for employers to carry out a risk assessment of all work which could expose an employee (or other people) to hazardous substances.

The regulations require formal written record of such assessments.

### Main Requirements:

- Assess the risks to health arising from the use of hazardous substances
- Decide what precautions are needed
- Prevent or control exposure of employees and/or other people to hazardous substances
- Ensure that control measures are used and maintained
- Where necessary, monitor the exposure of workers to hazardous substances
- Carry out any appropriate health surveillance
- Prepare plans and procedures to deal with accidents, incidents and emergencies involving hazardous substances
- Ensure that all employees who use hazardous substances are properly informed, trained and supervised.

### What does COSHH cover?

COSHH covers everyday substances that you might use at work such as paints and adhesives, as well as substances generated during work such as dusts and fumes. Look at the labels and the safety data sheets for the substances that you use; they may contain ingredients that are hazardous; they may be:

- Toxic, harmful, corrosive or irritant
- Sensitising, either skin or respiratory sensitisers
- Carcinogenic, teratogenic and mutagenic.

Also if your job can bring you into contact with, or you use or handle:

- Micro-organisms, biological, fungal and/or viral agents  
then these are also covered by the COSHH Regulations and an assessment must be carried out. This includes the Legionella bacteria. The HSE has issued a separate Approved Code of Practice (L8) which will be relevant to anyone who is responsible for designing or maintaining systems containing water
- COSHH also applies to high levels of airborne dust.

### COSHH Risk Assessment

Assessments must address the following considerations:

- The potential for a substance [or substances] to cause harm
- The likelihood of exposure occurring under the conditions of use
- Who could be exposed and how
- How often is exposure liable to occur
- The length of time over which exposure occurs
- The magnitude of the exposure experienced.

The purpose of the assessment is to enable a decision to be made about the measures necessary to control the hazards presented by substances. The result of the assessment must be communicated to employees. The record must be kept secure but available for inspection by enforcement bodies.

## Control Measures

The control measures necessary should be developed working through a hierarchy of measures:

- Elimination of the substance [i.e. do not use it, remove it from the workplace]
- Substitution with a less hazardous substance, or the same substance in a less hazardous form
- Engineering control measures, such as enclosures, local exhaust ventilation or working in a controlled environment
- The provision of Personal and Respiratory Protective Equipment as a last resort or in addition to Engineering controls for very hazardous substances.

Satisfactory control includes compliance with Workplace Exposure Limits, where such limits are published by HSE in EH40 (see references).

## Employers Responsibilities

*Note: An employer has many responsibilities under the COSHH Regulations, an outline of the main responsibilities follows, but it is recommended that employers refer to more detailed guidance*

- Employers are responsible for completing COSHH risks assessments and communicating the assessments to employees
- Employers are responsible for ensuring adequate control of exposure to hazardous substances
- Employers should ensure that thorough examinations and tests of all engineering controls are carried out at regular intervals. A record of the examinations has to be kept for 5 years
- Employers must review COSHH risk assessments if changes take place and an assessment becomes invalid, or at least every five years
- The Regulations specify the circumstances when employees must be subject to health surveillance. Employers must keep the records of such surveillance for 40 years
- COSHH assessments must be available for employees and for inspection by enforcement bodies.

## References and Further Information

- EH40, Occupational Exposure Limits, ISBN 0 7176 0832 (updated annually)
- HSG97, A Step by Step Guide to COSHH Assessment, ISBN 0 7176 2785 3
- L5 Approved Codes of Practice: Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002. ISBN 0 7176 2534 6
- HSG193 COSHH Essentials – Easy Steps to Control Chemicals. ISBN 0 7176 2737 3  
Available with supplement sheets from third parties
- HSE booklet “Legionnaires’ Disease - a guide for employers”, IACL27(rev2):  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/iacl27.pdf>

HSE Books  
PO Box 1999  
Sudbury  
Suffolk  
CO10 6FS

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For further information about the IET’s Health and Safety Policy Advisory Group please contact:

Health and Safety Policy Advisory Group Secretary  
Policy Department  
IET  
Michael Faraday House,  
Six Hills Way,  
Stevenage  
Herts.  
SG1 2AY  
[policy@theiet.org](mailto:policy@theiet.org)