

## Prevent work-related dermatitis

# IT'S IN YOUR HANDS<sup>©</sup>



Work-related dermatitis (also known as eczema) can cause serious problems. Many people live with pain and discomfort because of it and have had to give up work. It also results in millions of pounds being paid out to victims in compensation. However, by taking a sensible, positive approach to looking after health and safety, you could prevent work-related dermatitis and the associated problems in your workplace.

*Whether you are an employer or an employee, do not become a victim of work-related dermatitis.*

**Remember.... IT'S IN YOUR HANDS<sup>©</sup>**

Campaign initiated and managed by:



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## Did you know?

*A hairdresser had to sell his business because of disabling dermatitis. Tilers, painters, engineers and other workers have been forced to give up work due to dermatitis.*

*£150,000 was paid to a nurse because she could not work any longer.*

*Whether you are an employer or an employee, do not become a victim of work-related dermatitis.*

## Work-related dermatitis

- ❑ Is common and many individuals live with pain, discomfort and suffering.
- ❑ Causes people to lose their jobs because they can no longer work.
- ❑ Results in £millions being paid out to victims in compensation.
- ❑ Costs industry £millions each year in sickness, absence and retraining costs.
- ❑ Treatment takes up valuable resources of the National Health Service.

*This leaflet is designed to help you prevent work-related dermatitis caused by hazardous chemical agents and wet working in your workplace.*

*It provides practical help so that you do not become a victim of work-related dermatitis.*

## Introduction

### What causes dermatitis?

Work-related dermatitis can be caused by exposure to chemical agents and wet work (it means having hands repeatedly wet for long periods during the working day). Other agents causing work-related dermatitis can be biological (eg plants and/or bacteria), physical (eg vibration and/or radiation) and mechanical (eg abrasion). Dermatitis accounts for about 80% of work-related skin disease. Hands are most at risk but other parts of the body can be affected.



### Skin Contact

The ways in which skin comes into contact with chemical agents are direct contact with substances, splashes and touching contaminated surfaces (eg work surfaces, tools, coveralls and gloves). Also, airborne substances can deposit on the skin.



### Your Legal Obligations

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health [COSHH] Regulations require employers to identify the hazards associated with substances in the workplace, such as chemical agents, and assess the extent of likely exposure when these substances are used. Based on these assessments, they must then determine the health risks. Once a judgement of the risks has been evaluated, controls to minimise these must be put in place. The law is clear. Until this has been done employees may not work with substances hazardous to health.



The management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 describe what employers are required to do to manage health and safety. These regulations are important for substances like cosmetic products and wet working.



Employers must consult employees and their representatives on health and safety matters including when prevention of dermal exposure is not reasonably practicable.



Employees must co-operate with the employer to meet the legal obligations.

### What are hazardous substances?

In this context, these are substances (and wet work) capable of causing damage to the skin and can be divided into four groups:

- ❑ Those that cause irritation to the skin leading to irritant contact dermatitis.
- ❑ Those that sensitise the skin causing allergic contact dermatitis.
- ❑ Those that cause other skin disease such as skin cancer and skin discolouration (depigmentation).
- ❑ Those that cause other effects such as burns.



Many substances can penetrate the skin and are capable of causing diseases elsewhere in the body. While harmful substances and wet work are a major cause of skin disease, constantly working in uncomfortably hot or cold surroundings or excessively dry or wet conditions can also cause serious skin disorders.

## Preventing dermatitis in the workplace

### Control Measures

There is a legal duty to prevent work-related dermatitis by preventing skin contact with hazardous substances. This must be done by establishing a safe system of work, including safe handling methods, training and instruction of employees to help them carry out their work safely, providing suitable personal protective equipment [PPE] and skin care creams and adequate washing facilities. It also makes sense to carry out regular skin checks to identify cases of dermatitis and ensure that these controls are working.

#### DO NOT

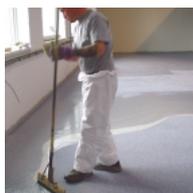
- ✗ Immerse hands in chemicals or allow prolonged repeated contact with water.
- ✗ Work so as to cause chemical splashes on the skin.
- ✗ Allow skin to come into contact with contaminated work-pieces, surfaces, tools, clothing, etc.

#### DO

- ✓ Know the health risks associated with chemicals and products used in the workplace. Ensure the labels on the container are read.
- ✓ Use tools and methods which will prevent skin contact with hazardous substances.
- ✓ Use suitable protective gloves where necessary.
- ✓ Ensure that hands are washed and dried regularly, including before donning and after removing protective gloves.
- ✓ Use pre- and after-work creams to ensure good skin condition. Remember, pre-work creams are not a replacement for protective gloves.
- ✓ Seek medical advice if there are concerns about the condition of the skin.

### Safe Working Distance (SWD)

SWD is an essential approach to reduce dermal exposure in the workplace. In many instances, when hands are being used as tools, they are frequently immersed in chemicals and/or water. This means there is no SWD. However, SWD between the hands and hazardous substances can be achieved in many ways.



Look at the practicability and implement the principle described, in order, below:-

1. Try to eliminate the use of a hazardous substance or wet working (eg. by using an alternative process).
2. Use less harmful substances (i.e. substitution).
3. Control the exposure by use of engineering controls such as automated handling, complete enclosure of the process, local exhaust ventilation.
4. Modify the process to prevent/minimise the contact with hands by establishing and implementing good working practices.
5. In situations where adequate control of skin exposure cannot be achieved by the above methods, provide suitable protection (eg. PPE and/or skin care products).

### How do I recognise hazardous substances?

Suppliers are required by law to identify the hazards of the chemicals and products they provide and they must give this information to the people they supply. The warning signs and R-phrases on the container and the safety data sheet will help you to identify chemicals causing harm to the skin.

Before using a chemical, always read the label on the container and consult the safety data sheet. Consumer products, such as those used for hairdressing, are unlikely to carry R-phrases or warning signs. In such cases, for further information, contact your supplier.



Irritant



Skin sensitizer



Corrosive

### How do I recognise dermatitis?

A simple approach is, if you answer 'yes' to any of the following you may have a problem with work-related dermatitis.

- ✓ Are substances with R-phrases handled?
- ✓ Are substances with irritant or corrosive signs handled?
- ✓ Do workers hands come into frequent contact with hazardous substances (eg adhesives, paints, inks, solvents, dyes, shampoo) on a daily basis?
- ✓ Do workers hands come into frequent and repeated contact with water due to the work they do (eg more than 2 hours per day or more than 20 times a day)?
- ✓ Do workers hands come into frequent contact with plants, flowers, or animal products?
- ✓ Does anyone have the following symptoms?
  - ✓ Redness/swelling of hands/fingers.
  - ✓ Cracking of skin on hands/fingers.
  - ✓ Blisters on hands/fingers.
  - ✓ Flaking/scaling of skin.
  - ✓ Itching of hands/fingers with cracks.
- ✓ Has anyone suffered from the above symptoms more than once in the last twelve months?
- ✓ Did anyone then say that their skin got better or the problems went away when they had periods off work?

A medical diagnosis and confirmation of work-related dermatitis will require an assessment by a medical professional. Safety representatives can provide a useful role in early detection of work-related dermatitis and its control.

## Preventing dermatitis in the workplace

In situations where adequate control of skin exposure cannot be achieved by other methods use suitable protection such as PPE and/or skin care products.

### Protective Gloves and Clothing

An 'any gloves will do' approach is a recipe for dermatitis. The law requires that the gloves must be matched to the substance, the work environment, the work and the wearer. Gloves for use with chemicals will carry a CE mark, a chemical protection sign and the relevant European Standard number (eg EN 374).

Since September 2003, gloves conforming to EN 374 can be marked with the 'chemical flask' pictogram if they are capable of providing protection against at least 3 chemicals from a list of 12 (identified by the code letters below the pictogram) for at least 30 minutes.

Water-proof gloves will be marked with the pictogram shown opposite. If these gloves are to be used with chemicals check with supplier for compatibility.

In either case, no protection can be assumed for any chemical other than the ones mentioned by the glove manufacturer. Similarly, using the gloves for longer than the claimed chemical resistance time may result in loss of protection. Always confirm with the glove manufacturer that their products are suitable for the chemicals you use, and duration of wear/use – no glove gives indefinite or 100% protection.

Always train staff using protective gloves to ensure that they know how to put on and remove gloves correctly to avoid skin contamination. Also, suitable storage and disposal facilities need to be provided.

Selecting suitable gloves and clothing is a complex process. The performance of chemical protective gloves and clothing critically depends on the type of material, thickness, size, length, the extent of chemical permeation, penetration and degradation. When selecting gloves or protective clothing, always involve the workforce and seek expert help such as from the manufacturer/supplier of the chemical or the gloves/clothing or a health and safety professional.

Do not use gloves or protective clothing for more than a day unless the manufacturer can guarantee extended use. Never launder gloves or single-use protective clothing, unless the manufacturer can guarantee the post-laundered performance.

### Skin Care

Skin care products help to maintain the skin in good condition and retain its protective function. The main types of skin care products are: pre-work creams, skin cleansers and after-work creams. When selecting skin care products always consult competent manufacturers or suppliers. Alternatively seek medical advice from a doctor or a nurse.

#### *Pre-work creams*

Formulated to provide a semi-resistant barrier between chemicals and the skin, although they do not function as protective gloves and are not PPE, these creams will facilitate the cleaning process allowing the use of less powerful cleansers. Pre-work creams are useful where gloves are considered not to be necessary.

#### *Skin cleansers*

These remove contaminants from the skin. Use the least powerful cleanser that will do the job.

#### *After-work creams (moisturisers)*

These restore the moisture content of the skin and provide a valuable contribution to reducing the risk of irritant dermatitis. Use them at the end of each work shift or after washing the hands, or more frequently if advised by a doctor or a nurse.



The IT'S IN YOUR HANDS® campaign has been jointly mounted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the British Safety Industry Federation (BSIF), the Safety Groups UK, the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) and the TUC to promote improved skin care in industrial and commercial organisations. The objective of the campaign is to significantly reduce the incidence of work-related dermatitis.

The IT'S IN YOUR HANDS® campaign is a 'win-win' and designed to benefit everyone involved. It should help:

👍 Employers gain a better understanding of the causes of skin diseases and the actions to take to eliminate/reduce employee absences and the consequential disruption this causes (eg. compensation claims and the likelihood of significantly increased insurance premiums).

👍 Employees gain a better understanding of work-related skin diseases and are better protected to eliminate pain, discomfort, sickness absence and consequential loss of income.

Participating organisations in this campaign will demonstrate their commitment as responsible organisations seeking to assist employers and help to improve the well-being of workers.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact the BSIF Info Desk on 01745 585600 or visit [www.bsif.co.uk](http://www.bsif.co.uk)

Contact the HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055 or visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

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