

COSHH

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002 apply to all workplaces using substances that are labelled as dangerous (i.e. very toxic, toxic, harmful irritant or corrosive) including substantial quantities of any dust; harmful micro-organisms and any material mixture or compound used at work which can harm people's health. As such, these apply to almost every place where GPMU members work using solvents, cleaning materials, adhesives, inks, aerosols, or where they are exposed to paper dust and various fumes.

Set out below are the main duties imposed on the employer by the COSHH Regs:-

Employers' Duties

The employer must:

- Assess the Risks
- Prevent or at least control exposure
- Ensure that the controls are properly used and maintained
- Examine and test the control measures
- Inform, Instruct and train employees and non-employees who are on the premises

Additionally, where appropriate, they must:

- Monitor the exposure of employees and non-employees who may be on the premises
- Ensure that employees who require it are under health surveillance

The COSHH Assessment

Under Reg 6 employers have an absolute duty to carry out an assessment. It is against the law for work involving hazardous substances to continue unless there has been a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risk created by that work to the health of employees. This does not simply mean collecting data sheets. The employer must assess the steps needed to meet the Regs, **and implement them**.

The risk assessment shall include consideration of: -

- a) The hazardous properties of the substance
- b) Information on health effects provided by the supplier, eg safety data sheets
- c) The level, type and duration of exposure
- d) The circumstances of the work, including the amount of the substance involved
- e) Activities such as maintenance, where there is the potential for a high level of exposure
- f) Any relevant occupational exposure limit
- g) The effect of preventive and control measures which have been or will be taken
- h) The results of relevant health surveillance
- i) The results of monitoring of exposure

- j) Where work will involve exposure to more than one hazardous substance, the risk presented by combined exposure
- k) The approved classification of any biological agent
- l) Such additional information the employer may need in order to complete the risk assessment

The assessment must be reviewed regularly, and forthwith if there is any reason to suppose that the original assessment is no longer valid, or when there are significant changes to the work, or when the results of any monitoring show it to be necessary.

Where 5 or more people are employed a written record must be kept of the significant findings of the risk assessment, and the steps taken to prevent or control exposure.

Competent Persons

Employers can either carry out the assessment or appoint someone else to do it. Employers should use competent employees, where they exist, in preference to external sources, for competent advice and assistance. Whatever the case those carrying out the assessment must: -

- be trained
- understand the COSHH Regs and associated material
- understand the work involving hazardous substances
- be aware of their own limitations and know when to seek outside advice
- have the authority and facilities to carry out the work.

Prevention or Control

Under Reg 7 the employer must prevent or, where this is not reasonably practicable, adequately control exposure to substances hazardous to health.

Substitution is the preferred method of compliance. It is important that where substitutes are used, these do not themselves present a further risk to health. If it is not reasonably practicable to prevent exposure, then employers must control it.

Such control measures include in order of priority:

- design and use of appropriate work processes, systems and engineering controls and the provision and use of suitable work equipment and materials
- control of exposure at source, including adequate ventilation systems and appropriate organisational measures
- where adequate control cannot be achieved by other means, the provision of suitable personal protective equipment in addition to the measures above.

Protection Measures

Reg 7 states that protection measures shall include:

- safe handling, storage and transport of hazardous substances, and hazardous waste
- adoption of suitable maintenance procedures

- reducing to the minimum required
 - the number of employees exposed
 - the level and duration of exposure
 - the quantity of hazardous substance present
- control of the working environment, including appropriate general ventilation
- appropriate hygiene measures including adequate washing facilities

Adequate Control

Where a substance has been assigned a Maximum Exposure Limit, control is only adequate if the level of exposure is reduced so far as is reasonably practicable, and in any case below the MEL.

Where an Occupational Exposure Standard (OES) has been assigned, control is adequate if the OES is not exceeded, or if it has, the employer identifies the reason and takes appropriate action as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Maintenance Measures

Under Reg 8 the employer has a duty to ensure that the control measures are maintained in an efficient state, working order, good repair and in a clean condition. Local exhaust ventilation must be examined **at least** once every 14 months. There is a general requirement for all control measures to be examined at suitable intervals, including PPE and respiratory protective equipment. A record should be kept and made available for at least five years.

Monitoring

The employer has a duty to carry out monitoring where the risk assessment indicates that: -

- a) where it is requisite for ensuring the maintenance of adequate control of the exposure of employees
- b) if it is otherwise requisite for protecting workers health

Monitoring should be carried out at regular intervals, and when any change occurs which may affect exposure. Employers should consult HSE guidance notes such as HSG173 Monitoring Strategies for Toxic Substances.

A record should also be kept and made available to safety reps, covering: -

- when the monitoring was done and the results
- the monitoring procedures that were adopted
- the location where the samples were taken

Monitoring records must be kept by the employer:

- for at least 40 years where the record is representative of the personal exposures of identifiable employees
- for at least 5 years in any other case

Health Surveillance

Health surveillance is required under Reg 11 where employees are exposed to a substance linked to a particular disease or adverse health effect. This might involve examinations by a doctor or trained nurse, but trained supervisors could, for example, check employees' skin for dermatitis. A record of any health surveillance carried out must be kept and held for 40 years.

Information, Instruction and Training

Under Reg 12 employers must provide employees with suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training, including:

- details of the hazardous substances to which they are liable to be exposed, including
 - names and risks to health
 - any relevant exposure limits
 - access to data sheets
 - other legislative provisions that apply
- the significant findings of the risk assessment
- appropriate precautions and actions to be taken by the employees to safeguard themselves and others
- the results of any monitoring, and in the case of substances assigned MELs, information forthwith if the MEL has been exceeded
- the collective results of any health surveillance (not identifying particular persons)

Accidents, incidents and emergencies

Reg 13 states that employers must prepare procedures, which can be put into effect, in the event of accidents, incidents or emergencies related to the presence of a hazardous substance in the workplace.

COSHH Essentials

COSHH Essentials is a simple step-by-step system that helps employers assess and control health risks when using chemicals (as required by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations). It contains control solutions for many standard work situations and helps firms to produce quickly and efficiently, a reliable assessment containing clear advice on what they need to do to protect their employees.

COSHH Essentials: *'easy steps to control chemicals'* (HSG193 ISBN 0-7176-2421-8, paper version) is available from HSE Books as a free Internet version at www.coshh-essentials.org.uk

A special version aimed at printers is also available..

Copies of "Control of chemicals in printing: COSHH Essentials for printers" ISBN 0-7176-1835-8 are available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 6FS, tel: 01787 881165 or fax: 01787 313995 or <http://www.hsebooks.co.uk>

Action Points

1. Ensure you are involved in the COSHH assessment, so that no substance is used without having first been fully assessed.
2. Use your rights to health and safety information to request and take copies of COSHH assessments and records of monitoring, including the results of local exhaust ventilation tests.
3. Check that measures to first prevent and then control exposure are introduced.
4. Ensure that the employer provides information and training in the risks and alternative means of working with substances hazardous to health.
5. Ask your employer whether there is a COSHH Essentials control solution for the jobs you do.