

**AN INTRODUCTION TO COSHH**  
**CONTROL OF SUBSTANCES HAZARDOUS TO**  
**HEALTH REGULATIONS 1988**

The basic principles of occupational hygiene underpin the COSHH Regulations, i.e.:

- 1 Assess the risk to health arising from work and what precautions are needed.
- 2 Introduce appropriate measures to prevent or control the risk.
- 3 Ensure that control measures are used and that equipment is properly maintained and procedures observed.
- 4 Where necessary, monitor the exposure of the workers and carry out an appropriate form of surveillance of their health.
- 5 Inform, instruct and train employees about the risks and the precautions to be taken.

It is an essential requirement for all employers to carry out assessments. The assessments must cover:

- § What substances are present? In what form?
- § What harmful effects are possible?
- § Where and how are the substances actually used or handled?
- § What harmful substances are given off, etc?
- § Who could be affected, to what extent, for how long and under what circumstances?
- § How likely is it that exposure will happen?
- § What precautions need to be taken to comply with the rest of the COSHH regulations?

**Control Measures**

Employers have to ensure that the exposure of employees to hazardous substances is prevented or if this is not reasonably practicable, adequately controlled.

On the basis of the assessment, employers have to decide which control measures are appropriate to the work situation in order to deal effectively with any hazardous substances that may be present. This may mean preventing exposure by:

- § Removing the hazardous substance, by changing the process.
  - § Substituting it with a safe or safer substance, or using it in a safer form.
- Or where this is not reasonably practicable, controlling exposure by for example: -
- § Totally enclosing the process.
  - § Using partial enclosure and extraction equipment.
  - § General ventilation.
  - § Using safe systems of work and handling procedures.

**Using the Control Measures**

The provision of control measures is not sufficient in itself, employers also have to ensure that they are properly applied.

COSHH places specific obligations on employers to ensure that all control measures are kept in an efficient working order and good repair.

COSHH requires that exposure of workers should be monitored in certain cases, for example: -

- § Where there could be serious risk to health if control measures were to fail or deteriorate.
- § If the employer cannot be sure that exposure limits are not being exceeded.
- § Where the employer cannot be sure that particular control measures are working properly.

Employees have to be informed about: -

- § The risks arising from their work.
  - § The precautions to be taken.
- And if carried out: -
- § The results of monitoring.
  - § The collective, anonymised results of health surveillance.

### **Safety Tips and Hazardous Materials**

- § Be aware of the hazardous substances used and stored in your work area.
- § Read container labels and thoroughly check relevant Material Safety Data Sheets before using a chemical
- § Know the company's procedures for dealing with hazardous substances
- § Follow the company's procedures always
- § Don't take shortcuts
- § Check containers regularly for leaks
- § Make sure all containers are clearly labelled
- § Never store flammable or explosive materials near a heat source
- § Never undertake hot work near a flammable or explosive material
- § Always wear the correct PPE - it must match the hazard
- § Don't wear contaminated PPE
- § Dispose of chemical containers correctly and in accordance with your company procedures
- § Wash your hands thoroughly after working with chemicals

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