

Work and Dermatitis

From laboratory workers to car mechanics, many workers suffer from work related dermatitis. We don't know the actual numbers. This is partly because

- the work relatedness of a skin condition is often poorly recognised and documented
- not all workers with an occupational related skin disease will present to a medical practitioner and
- workers may be reticent to acknowledge an occupational cause fearing it may affect their employment.

A Western Australian study reported that 2 in 5 people with dermatitis had changed jobs due to their dermatitis. A quarter stated they had lost income from the disability caused by their dermatitis.

Work related dermatitis, like work related asthma is under recognised, under compensated and for some is a lifelong affliction.

Work related dermatitis can be due to irritation of the skin, eg wet work, friction and chemicals, often in combination or allergies to certain chemicals.

Dermatitis, a chronic condition, is only one of the hazards for our skin. Some substances can cause chemical burns and other substances can be absorbed through the skin and cause damage to other parts of the body.

Common substances known to cause allergies include

- latex gloves eg laboratories
- acrylic monomer highly sensitising allergen
- epoxy resins are very versatile chemicals eg water resistant or UV absorbers in paint adhesives, vehicle parts
- preservatives, such as methylisothiazolinone(MIT) and/or methylchloroisothiazolinone(MCIT) are often found in water based products
- chromates in cement.

Avoiding exposure

All hazardous substances such as solvents, cutting oils, paints, hand cleansers, oils, greases, gasoline, diesel fuel and cleaners must be supplied with labels and Safety Data Sheets.

Check for these risk phrases:

- R21** – Harmful in contact with skin
- R24** – Toxic in contact with skin
- R27** – Very toxic in contact with skin
- R38** – Irritating to skin
- R43** – May cause sensitisation by skin contact
- R66** – Repeated exposure may cause skin dryness and cracking

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and the pictograms for health hazards and chronic health hazards.



For substances that may have direct effects on the skin or are absorbed through the skin look out for these phrases in the Safety Data Sheet or label.

- H310** – Fatal in contact with skin
- H311** – Toxic in contact with skin
- H312** - Harmful in contact with skin
- H314** – Causes severe skin burns and eye damage
- H315** - Causes skin irritation

Apply the Hierarchy of control [e.g. Regulation 36 in WHS Regulations]

Eliminate risks to health and safety

If can't minimise must implement risk control measures

- (a) substituting (wholly or partly)*
- (b) isolating the hazard from any person exposed to it;*
- (c) implementing **engineering controls**.*

*If a risk then remains, **administrative controls**.*

*If a risk then remains, **provision and use of suitable personal protective equipment**.*

Note: A combination of the controls set out in this regulation may be used to minimise risks, so far as is reasonably practicable, if a single control is not sufficient for the purpose.

Correct Gloves are essential

The selection of correct gloves for the hazards is essential. When using chemical it is essential to check the Safety Data Sheet on the correct gloves to use eg

- disposable vinyl gloves are not appropriate for exposure to many industrial chemicals
- disposable nitrile gloves often provide good protection compared with disposable latex gloves
- thicker, longer, reusable gloves for some types of wet work
- two pairs of nitrile disposable gloves are recommended for protection against acrylates
- thick reusable nitrile gloves for use against epoxy resins.