



Working Safely with Hazardous Substances

Hazardous substances are frequently used at work. They are not limited to manufactured chemicals such as paints, oils, pesticides and grease, etc. They also include substances such as dust, fumes and infectious organisms. Substances can be hazardous by nature and/or are hazardous when heated, ground or mixed with other materials. Sometimes, even pouring substances from one container to another may be hazardous.

Main Points

Every year, thousands of people at work are made ill by hazardous substances. This could be from contracting lung disease such as asthma or cancer and skin disease such as dermatitis

Hazardous substances can affect you in various ways such as:-

- Breathing in gases, fumes, mist or dust
- Contact with the skin (causing burns or dermatitis)
- Swallowing or being absorbed through the skin (e.g. through eating or smoking after using hazardous substances)
- Contact with the eyes (e.g. splashes)
- Skin puncture (e.g. needles, nails or barbed wire)
- Fire (e.g. Flammable substances)

You can reduce the chance of an accident or ill health by following these guidelines:-

- Only work with hazardous substances if you have been trained and authorised in their safe use, handling and storage.
- Always read and follow the label or the manufacturer's materials safety data sheet (MSDS) for the substance you are about to use.
- Follow directions for proper use, storage and disposal including containers.
- Make sure you are familiar with the meaning of the warning symbols/hazard label – the symbols have been designed to give you instant recognition of potentially harmful or dangerous substances.
- Report to your supervisor or manager if any control measures have been put in place to protect you including the use of PPE are not working.
- Tell your Supervisor/Manager if you feel unwell during or after using a substance.
- Clean up any spillages and always replace lids on containers.
- Report any leaking or damaged containers.
- Know who the First Aider is and where the first aid kit/eye wash is located. If you get a chemical on your skin or eyes wash it off with clean, running water for as long as it is needed (at least 20 minutes). Obtain medical advice as soon as possible and if necessary, call the emergency services.

Wear the personal protective equipment provided – this can include:-

- Gloves or gauntlets
- Goggles or face shield
- Chemical suit/overall
- Chemical Safety boots
- Respirator mask or hood
- Breathing apparatus
- Clean and inspect protective clothing regularly
- Take Care when opening containers, some materials are quite volatile and it is possible that a slight pressure may build-up in the container.
- Keep the substance in its original container where possible.

Make sure if you do transfer a substance into another container that:-

- The container is suitable for the substance (e.g. some plastics or metals are not suitable for storing corrosive substances).
- The container is clean.
- You label the container clearly indicating the new contents and their hazard label.

Always follow directions for proper use, storage and disposal

📞 01823 299580 ✉ info@atlas-sm.co.uk 🌐 www.atlas-sm.co.uk

Atlas Safety Management Ltd.

Registered Office: Unit Z1 Westpark, Chelston, Wellington, Taunton, TA21 9AD. Company No: 9470014.



Talk to Atlas about Safety Management for your business

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