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COSHH – Hazardous substances

Using chemicals or other hazardous substances at work can put people's health at risk, so the law requires employers to control exposure to hazardous substances to prevent ill health. They have to protect both employees and others who may be exposed by complying with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) (as amended).

If you as an employer fail to adequately control hazardous substances, your employees or others may become ill. Effects from hazardous substances range from mild eye irritation to chronic lung disease or, on occasions, death.

Hazardous substances

Hazardous substances include:

- substances used directly in work activities (eg adhesives, paints, cleaning agents);
- substances generated during work activities (eg fumes from soldering and welding);
- naturally occurring substances (eg grain dust);

- biological agents such as bacteria and other micro-organisms.

TCH Safety Consultants can identify the substances in use within your business and help you complete a risk assessment.

Who should do the assessment?

As the employer, legal responsibility for the assessment is yours, but others can do some or even most of the work of preparing it on your behalf. Except in very simple cases, whoever carries out the assessment will need to:

- have access to and understand the COSHH Regulations and relevant Approved Codes of Practice or to someone else who does;
- be able to get all the necessary information and have the knowledge and experience to make correct decisions about the risks and the actions needed.

You and your employees have the most knowledge of what really happens in the workplace. Use this knowledge before deciding whether you need outside help. If there is no expertise available in the company



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to assess the more complex risks, you will need to get competent help, for example from a professionally qualified occupational hygienist, health and safety specialist or a trade association.

The COSHH Regulations require you to prevent exposure to substances hazardous to health, if it is reasonably practicable to do so.

COSHH requires your employees to make proper use of control measures and to report defects. It is your responsibility to take all reasonable steps to ensure that they do so. This is why you must give your employees suitable training, information and appropriate supervision

Safety is no accident