Toolbox talk

Hazardous substances (COSHH)

Know what you're using and how to stay safe with it

10 minutes

For: Anyone using paints, glues, solvents, cement, resins, cleaning products or making dust and fumes

Why it matters

Everyday site products like paint, glue, solvents and cement can damage your lungs, skin and eyes, or make you ill over time. Dust and fumes you create, like wood dust and welding fume, count too. The COSHH Regulations require the risks to be assessed and controlled.

Key points

1. Hazardous substances include paints, glues, solvents, wet cement, resins, wood dust and fumes from welding or cutting.
2. They can harm you by breathing them in, through skin contact, by swallowing, or by getting in your eyes.
3. Check labels and hazard statements, but do not rely on symbols alone. Dust, fumes and some other harmful substances may have no product label.
4. The safety data sheet says what the dangers are and what to do in an emergency.
5. Best first: remove the substance or use a safer one, like a paste instead of a powder.
6. Next: change the process, enclose it, or use extraction near the source.
7. Protective equipment like gloves and masks is the last resort, and it must fit you.
8. Chemicals can reach your mouth from unwashed hands when you eat, drink or smoke.

Sources: HSE: Working with substances hazardous to health (INDG136); HSE: Hazardous substances in construction; HSE: COSHH basics.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/coshh**

Hazardous substances (COSHH)

Do

- Read the label and follow the COSHH assessment for each product.
- Use the extraction and controls provided, and do your daily checks.
- Wear the right gloves, mask or eye protection, and make sure they fit.
- Wash your hands before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Report anything that isn't working, like broken extraction or damaged gloves.

Don't

- Don't decant chemicals into unlabelled or drinks containers.
- Don't mix products unless the instructions say it's safe.
- Don't eat, drink or smoke where hazardous substances are used.
- Don't use a product you don't know about. Ask first.

Ask the group

- Which products on this job carry hazard symbols?
- Where are the safety data sheets kept on this site?
- Could we use a safer product or method for any of our tasks?
- What would you do if you got a chemical splash in your eye?

If it goes wrong: If a chemical gets in your eyes, rinse them with clean water or an eyewash straight away and get first aid. For skin contact, wash it off. If someone feels unwell after breathing fumes, get them into fresh air. Check the safety data sheet, call 999 if it's serious, and tell your supervisor.

On this site

Nearest first aider _____

Emergency assembly point _____

Site-specific hazards and controls _____

_____

Sources: HSE: Working with substances hazardous to health (INDG136); HSE: Hazardous substances in construction; HSE: COSHH basics.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/coshh**

Attendance register

Hazardous substances (COSHH)

Site / project _____ Date and time _____

Presented by _____ Company _____

	Name (print)	Company	Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			

By signing, attendees confirm they took part in this toolbox talk and understood the key points. Keep this record with your site safety file.

Presenter signature _____ Follow-up actions _____

Quick check

Hazardous substances (COSHH)

Tick one answer for each question. Your presenter has the answers.

Name _____ Date _____

1. Which of these is the best way to control a hazardous substance?

- [ ] Wear a mask
- [ ] Remove it or use a safer product
- [ ] Work faster

2. Where would you find what to do in an emergency with a product?

- [ ] The safety data sheet
- [ ] The delivery note
- [ ] The price list

3. How can a chemical get into your body when you eat?

- [ ] It can't
- [ ] From unwashed hands to your mouth
- [ ] Only through your lungs

4. Does dust you make, like wood dust, count as a hazardous substance?

- [ ] No, only bottled chemicals count
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] Only if it smells

5. What must be true of the protective equipment you use?

- [ ] It must fit you
- [ ] Any size will do
- [ ] It can be shared without cleaning

Sources: HSE: Working with substances hazardous to health (INDG136); HSE: Hazardous substances in construction; HSE: COSHH basics.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/coshh**

For the presenter

Answers and sources

Quick check answers

1. Remove it or use a safer product

HSE puts removing the substance or swapping to a safer one first. Protective equipment is the last resort.

2. The safety data sheet

The supplier's safety data sheet explains the dangers and emergency, storage and handling measures.

3. From unwashed hands to your mouth

HSE warns chemicals can transfer from unwashed hands to your mouth when eating or smoking.

4. Yes

HSE includes dusts and fumes created by work, such as wood dust and welding fume.

5. It must fit you

HSE says protective equipment must fit the wearer to work properly.

Sources

- HSE: Working with substances hazardous to health (INDG136)
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.pdf
- HSE: Hazardous substances in construction
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/index.htm
- HSE: COSHH basics
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/index.htm

> **Presenting tips:** keep it to about 10 minutes, use real examples from your site, ask the group questions rather than reading everything out, and record attendance on the register.

Sources: HSE: Working with substances hazardous to health (INDG136); HSE: Hazardous substances in construction; HSE: COSHH basics.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/coshh**

Read the label before you use it.

1. Use the safer product if you can
2. Use the extraction provided
3. Wash hands before eating

Hazardous substances (COSHH) toolbox talk

Scan to read the full talk, free from Tradefox.
tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks

Read the label before you use it.

1. **Use the safer product if you can**
2. **Use the extraction provided**
3. **Wash hands before eating**

Hazardous substances (COSHH) toolbox talk

Scan to read the full talk, free from Tradefox.
tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks

Sources and qualifications

Hazardous substances (COSHH)

Scope: Great Britain safety legislation unless a nation is identified. Northern Ireland has separate legislation. Site rules can be stricter than minimum legal duties; use the site assessment, instructions and competent supervision.

A4 applicability: no installation-design requirement is asserted in this talk. Its claims are referenced to the subject-specific sources below.

S1. HSE INDG136: Hazardous substances

COSHH scope, routes of entry, assessment, labels/SDS, hierarchy of controls, PPE and hygiene; all key points and quiz.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.pdf

S2. HSE: COSHH basics

Generated dust/fume and unlabelled hazards, substitution, controls, training and emergency planning; Do/Don't.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/index.htm