Toolbox talk

Skin problems from work

Avoid, protect, check: look after your skin

10 minutes

For: Anyone working with wet cement, solvents, oils, adhesives or doing lots of wet work

Why it matters

Contact dermatitis can make skin red, cracked and so painful you can't work. Once you become allergic to something, it's likely to be permanent. Wet cement can also cause serious burns if it's trapped against your skin.

Key points

1. Dermatitis comes from skin contact with irritants or allergens, like wet cement, solvents, detergents, adhesives and some wood dusts.
2. Signs include redness, flaking, blistering, cracking, swelling, itching and pain.
3. Lots of wet work can cause it too, like wet hands for over 2 hours a shift.
4. Once you're sensitised to a substance, it's likely to be permanent. Any later contact can trigger it.
5. Cement contains chromate, which can cause allergic dermatitis. Some tradespeople have had to change trades.
6. Wet cement trapped against skin can cause serious burns.
7. Follow HSE's approach: avoid contact, protect your skin, and check it regularly.
8. Catching it early makes a full recovery more likely. Report itchy, dry or red skin.

Sources: HSE: Work-related contact dermatitis; HSE: Preventing work-related skin problems; HSE: Cement.
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/dermatitis**

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Do

- Use tools with longer handles or pre-mixed products to keep skin away.
- Wear gloves that are the right size and right for the job.
- Wash off cement and chemicals straight away, then dry your skin well.
- Moisturise often, especially at the end of the day.
- Check your hands regularly and tell your supervisor about any changes.

Don't

- Don't kneel in wet cement without waterproof trousers.
- Don't let cement get trapped inside gloves or boots.
- Don't clean your skin with solvents, thinners or rough cleaners.
- Don't ignore itchy, dry or red skin. It can get worse.

Ask the group

- Which products on this job could cause skin problems?
- Are our gloves the right type for cement and the chemicals we use?
- Where can we wash with warm water and soap on this site?
- Has anyone had sore, cracked or itchy hands from work?

If it goes wrong: If cement or a chemical gets on your skin, wash it off straight away with clean water and soap. If it gets in your eyes, use the eyewash and get first aid. If your skin is red, cracked, itchy or painful, tell your supervisor and see your GP.

On this site

Nearest first aider _____

Emergency assembly point _____

Site-specific hazards and controls _____

_____

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Attendance register

Skin problems from work

Site / project

Date and time

Presented by

Company

	Name (print)	Company	Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
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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

Skin problems from work

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

Name _____ Date _____

1. What are HSE's three steps for preventing skin problems?

- [ ] Avoid, protect, check
- [ ] Wash, dry, ignore
- [ ] Wait, see, report

2. Why is becoming allergic to a substance serious?

- [ ] It wears off in a week
- [ ] It's likely to be permanent
- [ ] It only affects your face

3. What can wet cement trapped against your skin cause?

- [ ] Nothing
- [ ] Serious burns
- [ ] A suntan

4. Which gloves should you wear?

- [ ] Any gloves
- [ ] Ones that are the right size and right for the task
- [ ] Fabric gloves for cement

5. Why check your skin regularly?

- [ ] Early detection helps prevent worse dermatitis
- [ ] It's not needed
- [ ] Only doctors can check

Sources: HSE: Work-related contact dermatitis; HSE: Preventing work-related skin problems; HSE: Cement.
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For the presenter

Answers and sources

Quick check answers

1. Avoid, protect, check

HSE's approach is to avoid contact, protect the skin, and check it regularly.

2. It's likely to be permanent

HSE says sensitisation is likely to be permanent, so any later contact can trigger dermatitis.

3. Serious burns

Wet cement is highly alkaline, and HSE warns it can cause serious burns if trapped against skin.

4. Ones that are the right size and right for the task

HSE says to pick gloves that fit and suit the job, such as waterproof ones rated for alkalis for cement.

5. Early detection helps prevent worse dermatitis

HSE says spotting early signs makes a full recovery more likely.

Sources

- HSE: Work-related contact dermatitis
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/employ/whatare.htm
- HSE: Preventing work-related skin problems
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/employ/prevention.htm
- HSE: Cement
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/cement.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.

Look after your skin.

1. **Avoid contact where you can**
2. **Wear the right gloves**
3. **Check your skin often**

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Sources and qualifications

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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: Contact dermatitis

Irritants/allergens, symptoms, sensitisation, wet work and early reporting; key points 1-5 and 8.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/employ/whatare.htm

S2. HSE: Preventing skin problems

Avoid/protect/check, gloves, hygiene, skin checks and reporting; Do/Don't and quiz.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/employ/prevention.htm

S3. HSE: Cement

Alkaline burns, chromate sensitisation, appropriate gloves and prompt washing/first aid; key points 5-6 and emergency.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/cement.htm