

**PURPOSE**

The objective of this section is to protect the safety and health of persons using surface coatings (paints and related materials) in the course of undertaking work. General safety information and guidelines in regards to solvents and airborne particles, and a listing of selected relevant standards are provided.

**GENERAL SAFETY INFORMATION**

Paints, in the main solvent-based paints, contain hazardous materials.

These include flammable solvents, materials which can harm the skin or eyes, and or damage the user's health if swallowed or inhaled.

Australia has adopted the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals, or GHS, which is a United Nations initiative to internationally standardise chemical classifications, labelling and Safety Data Sheets (SDS) in the workplace.

Many potential hazards exist in the workplace, more so when handling chemicals.

The level of risk associated with the hazard needs to be reduced. The implementation of management strategies, workplace procedures, and operator precautions can assist in reducing the associated risks to an acceptable level.

***Hazards to the health of the operator***

When using a surface coating the operator could be exposed to:

- Vapours through inhalation – during the drying (curing) process solvent evaporates into the work environment
- Liquid chemicals through direct contact – paints and thinners may cause irritation or chemical burns if swallowed or inhaled as spray droplets, or when in contact with the skin and eyes
- Powders or dusts through inhalation – generated through spraying, blasting or sanding may cause irritation of the airways

***Hazards to the work environment***

The use of solvent-based products in the workplace can lead to:

- Fire during storage or transport – flammable liquids can be ignited and will support a fire in the event of an incident
- Explosion during application – a flammable atmosphere, a solvent vapour and oxygen (air) mixture, can explode within certain concentration limits if exposed to an ignition source

**Some measures which are always applicable are:**

- Assess and review the ventilation in the workplace
- Wash hands regularly and thoroughly after handling liquid chemicals
- Be aware of powder and dust in the workplace
- Always store flammable liquids in closed containers and clean up spills and leaks immediately

Assess and control possible ignition sources in the workplace

**GUIDELINES**

The following information is general in nature and should be read in conjunction with the relevant Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and Product Data Sheet (PDS).

Before using any liquid chemicals (paints and related materials) in the workplace, a risk assessment should be conducted.

**Liquid chemicals**

Solvents and other components in some paints and related materials can cause local irritation to the skin and eyes. This may be only minor and temporary for some but others, in the case of sensitive skin, exposure could lead to long term irritation (dermatitis).

Barrier creams together with gloves, goggles and possibly face masks should be used when handling products.

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In all cases, however, the habit of using solvents (thinners) to clean the skin after painting should be discouraged. Any paint on the skin should be removed at once with skin cleaning liquids or gels and then washed with water. During use if paint splashed into the eyes then flush the eyes immediately with clean water for at least 15 minutes. If symptoms persist then assistance from a health care professional should be sought.

#### *Airborne particles and vapours*

Sanding dust and spray mist can be filtered using a respirator (mask) containing a dust filter cartridge.

Cartridges are also available which absorb solvent vapours. Combination units are also available. It is most important that the correct filter for the class of work being done is used.

Suppliers are usually happy to assist in the selection of appropriate equipment for the needs of the general workplace and a specific task.

In areas where dust and vapours are generated it is important to provide good natural or mechanical ventilation.

#### **Isocyanates**

Isocyanates are known sensitizers. Although there may be no immediate health symptoms, without adequate precautions workers will become allergic to the isocyanate containing products and suffer worsening breathing difficulties or skin complaints.

Ensure adequate ventilation when using.

If inhalation risk exists, wear suitable respiratory equipment. Wear a positive-air pressure air-supplied full-face respirator whilst spraying and until spray mist has been effectively dispersed. Avoid contact with skin, eyes and inhalation of vapour, or mist spray.

Wear overalls, protective gloves and safety glasses.

Keep container closed when not in use. Keep away from sources of ignition. Do not empty into drains. Take precautionary measures against static discharges.

#### **OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

The following documents are provided as a reference and could be used in conjunction with any information gathering process or risk assessment being conducted.

- AS/NZS 1715 Selection, Use and Maintenance of Respiratory Protective Equipment
- AS/NZS 1716 Respiratory Protective Devices
- AS/NZS 2430.3.3 Classification of Hazardous Areas – Examples of area classification – Flammable Liquids
- AS 1940 Storage and Handling of Flammable and Combustible Liquids
- AS/NZS 1336 Eye and Face Protection - Guidelines
- AS/NZS 2161 Occupational Protective Gloves – Selection, Use and Maintenance



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