

12. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

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Policy

The Board of Directors and the Chief Executive of the Society recognise the risks to health & safety of colleagues and others that can arise during the course of handling and using hazardous substances. In order to meet their legal responsibilities under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations, and to protect the health & safety of colleagues, the following procedures have been adopted.

Procedure

An up-to-date inventory of all hazardous substances used on the premises has been compiled and available on the Society Intranet. It is the responsibility of the site manager to ensure the inventory is kept up-to-date.

Where groups arrange for specific substances to be used, they will ensure that a suitably qualified person appointed by the manufacturer has assessed the potential of those substances to cause injury, or adversely affect health. The findings of any such assessment, together with the measures to reduce the risk must be obtained via a 'safety data sheet' prior to use.

Where an assessment identifies potential significant hazards to colleagues' health & safety, the assessment findings, together with the precautions to be taken to reduce the risk, will be communicated by managers and supervisors to the appropriate colleagues.

All information, including the inventory of hazardous substances, assessments, material safety data sheets and other technical information, will be upon the Health & Safety Intranet page under COSHH.

Each department manager or supervisor will ensure that all hazardous substances are included on the list and are subject to an assessment, and that containers carrying such substances are suitable and their contents clearly identified at all times.

Where types of substances are replaced or suppliers changed, the responsibility to inform the Health & Safety Team of this so that new data sheets can be obtained will lie with the Operations / Area / Regional / District Manager.

Minimising the Risk

Cleaning Agents

Only authorised cleaning agents, which have been subject to a formal risk assessment are to be used on the site. These are supplied in containers marked with the handling and directional instructions, safety information and first aid measures. Cleaning agents are only to be used by colleagues trained in their use and authorised to use them.

Some cleaning agents may require users to wear protective clothing. Sufficient quantities of the specified clothing will be made available within the site, and managers must ensure that wearing of such equipment when stipulated is mandatory.

Cleaning agents **must not** be mixed unless the manufacturer has indicated that it is safe to do so.

Cleaning agents must never be kept in unmarked or unlabelled containers. If cleaning agents are decanted from bulk containers to smaller containers for practical use, each container must be clearly labelled.

Contract Cleaners

It is the site manager's responsibility to ensure that when contract cleaners are used on the premises, all substances brought onto the premises have been subject to a formal COSHH assessment. The assessment must be kept within the storage area allocated to the cleaners.

Contract cleaners' storage facilities must be kept clean and tidy and any items under the COSHH assessment will be stored in the correct manner.

Stock & Goods for Sale

All stock and goods for sale must remain in their packaging that will clearly show the manufacturer's labelling with respect to the hazardous nature of the product.

If accidental spillage occurs, the manufacturer's label must be read to determine if any precautions in handling the product (protective clothing etc.) need to be taken, and the spillage must be cleaned up immediately. In places where members of the public may be present, the spillage must not be left unattended.

Storage facilities for stock and goods for sale must be compatible with the manufacturer's instructions as they relate to temperature, storage with other products, dampness, proximity to heat source etc.

Colleague Responsibilities

The framework for controlling exposure of persons to hazardous substances is laid down by the COSHH regulations and the approved codes of practice. Substances classified as hazardous can be toxic, corrosive, harmful, irritant or flammable.

To minimise any risk associated with substances, managers should ensure that colleagues report any of the following instances immediately:

- Leaks from packages or containers.
- Accidental spillage.
- Puncture of packages and containers.
- Subdividing substances or breaking down from bulk storage.
- Accidental mixing of incompatible products during storage or handling.

Some substances, even though not classed as hazardous, may have a sensitising effect on certain individuals, creating adverse reactions or medical conditions such as dermatitis. Colleagues who suffer or suspect they have suffered such a reaction through the use of or exposure to any chemical or substance, must report it to their manager immediately.

Asbestos

Many properties within the UK will have Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM) within their construction. Items that may have ACMs are insulation boards in cold store units, certain wall and ceiling panels, or thermal lagging. The extent of asbestos within a property depends mainly on its age.

Asbestos in the forms mentioned above is perfectly safe, provided that the material containing the asbestos is not damaged and the surface is sealed by paint or some other form of surface sealant.

If this is not the case then asbestos fibres can escape into the atmosphere, and the risk to health can be substantial.

All premises within the business have been or will be surveyed for the presence of ACMs. Any that are found and are regarded as immediately hazardous will be removed by specialists as soon as possible after the survey.

The location of any remaining ACMs in good condition will be noted on a special location diagram (asbestos register), and a copy will be issued by the Property Group. This should then be held in the policy and procedures document.

Where ACMs are known to exist, it is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that the following control measures are followed:

- Be aware of the location of any ACMs once highlighted.
- Keep the asbestos register and location drawing available for inspection at all times.
- Regularly check the physical condition of such ACMs and report any damage or deterioration to the Property Helpdesk or the Health & Safety Team immediately.
- Never do or allow work to commence which entails breaking the surface of any material known to contain asbestos.
- Never attempt to remove or dispose of material that is known to contain asbestos.

Dealing with all aspects of asbestos demands great care and specialist advice. If at any time any colleague has any concerns about the material, or suspects it to be present, they should contact the Property Helpdesk immediately.