Hazardous Substances – **General**

08.01.02

Why regulations are required >

This is one of a series of information bulletins which have been written to assist the employer to manage risks associated with hazardous substances. The bulletins make up a package which reflects the Australian Safety and Compensation Council's (ASCC) approach to managing workplace hazardous substances, which is currently being adopted throughout Australia

Why the control of hazardous substances is necessary

Hazardous substances are chemicals, dusts and other emissions which can affect the health of workers who use or come into contact with them. (NT WorkSafe information bulletin 08.01.01 explains what a hazardous substance is).

Thousands of workers in Australia are potentially exposed to and affected by hazardous substances every day. Strategies to control hazardous substances are essential protect all workers.

The cost to the economy can be measured in millions of dollars, but the cost to ill or injured workers, their families and the community is far greater and forgotten.

Health effects may be **acute**, from short term exposure (usually to high concentrations) or **chronic** effects resulting from long exposure (of usually low concentrations). Chronic effects may not become apparent for years, therefore, are hardest to predict and prevent and the cause is often difficult to identify.

Health effects from hazardous substances

The most common health effect is skin irritation (Dermatitis). Other effects include:

- **Occupation Asthma;**
- **Chemical Poisoning;**
- **Cancer (in the long term).**

The role of the hazardous substances regulations

Division 5 Hazardous substances, of Part 7 of the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations* describe the essential elements for managing hazardous substances in the workplace.

To manage hazardous substances, employers and employees need information about the health effects of hazardous substances and their safe use and handling. Manufacturers and suppliers of hazardous substances have a key role to play in ensuring that information is provided with hazardous substances supplied to the workplace.

After the information is supplied, the employer must assess how hazardous the substance is, which will determine the appropriate controls are put in place.

Environmental monitoring or health surveillance may be necessary depending on the type of hazardous substances being used or produced. These tests determine both the levels of exposure in the workplace atmosphere and whether the workers' health is being affected by exposure to hazardous substances.

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