



WHMIS

Quick Facts

Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System



Sensitizers

Common occupational skin sensitizers (WHMIS Toxic) are formaldehyde, methyl methacrylate and toluene diisocyanate. Common occupational respiratory sensitizers (WHMIS Very Toxic) are toluene diisocyanate, maleic anhydride, and latex.

Sensitizers are materials that can **cause severe skin and/or respiratory responses** in a sensitized worker after exposure to a very small amount of the material. Sensitization develops over time. When a worker is first exposed to a sensitizer, there may be no obvious reaction. However, future exposures can lead to increasingly severe reactions in sensitized workers. Not all exposed workers will react to sensitizing materials. Some workers will never become sensitized.



Hazards of Sensitizers

Skin sensitization – skin sensitizers can cause an allergic reaction, with redness, rash, itching, swelling or blisters at the point of contact or elsewhere in the body.

Respiratory sensitization – respiratory sensitizers can at first cause symptoms similar to a cold or mild hay fever. However, eventually severe asthmatic symptoms can develop in sensitized workers, including wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing and/or coughing. A severe attack can cause death.

A workplace material is classified as a respiratory sensitizer only if it has caused sensitization reactions in a significant number of exposed workers. Skin sensitizers are classified using animal tests or human experience.

Other hazards – sensitizers may cause other toxic effects

Working Safely with Sensitizing Materials

UNDERSTAND all of the hazards associated with the material, and how to use it safely.

CONSULT the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for information about the hazards and necessary precautions for the sensitizer(s) you are using.

BE AWARE of the typical symptoms of an allergic reaction.

KNOW appropriate first aid procedures.

REPORT any signs of illness to your supervisor immediately.

PREVENT exposure to sensitizers. Closed handling systems can prevent the release of the materials (dust, mist, vapour) into the workplace.

WEAR appropriate personal protective equipment, if necessary to avoid all contact with sensitizers, including contaminated equipment.

PUT on a suitable respirator immediately in the event that a respiratory sensitizer is released into the workplace.

USE sensitizers only in well-ventilated areas.

USE the smallest quantity of sensitizer possible.

REPORT leaks, spills or ventilation failures to your supervisor immediately.

WASH hands thoroughly after handling a sensitizer.

REMOVE contaminated clothing promptly and store in a closed container.

DISCARD, or DECONTAMINATE and LAUNDER contaminated clothing before rewearing.

UNDERSTAND and PRACTICE emergency procedures so that you know what to do if it becomes necessary.

DO NOT SMOKE, EAT or DRINK in work areas that may contain sensitizers.

DO NOT REUSE empty containers. Empty containers may contain hazardous residues.

***In the event of an emergency...
Warn people in the area and move to a safe
location to call for emergency help.***

H46-2/04-376E ISBN 0-662-38545-4
© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada,
represented by the Minister of Health Canada 2006

For additional information and resources visit www.whmis.gc.ca and/or www.ccohs.ca