



COSHH: Employer Responsibilities

In order to fully comply with COSHH employers must undertake eight basic control measures.

Step 1: Assess risk

The employer's first step is to decide whether there is a problem with any substance(s) being used, or those that employees may be exposed to. This is called 'risk assessment'.

Within this risk assessment the employer should identify:

- who is exposed to hazardous substances
- how each substance is used
- the hazards of each substance (can it be swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin)
- the risks to health

Step 2: Decide what precautions are needed

Once any significant risks have been identified the employer must decide on what action to undertake in order to remove them or reduce them to an acceptable level (such as changing the product (chemical) to a less hazardous product, or changing a working practice.)

Step 3: Prevent or adequately control exposure

COSHH regulations require the employer to prevent exposure to substances hazardous to health, if it is reasonably practical to do so. Examples of what may be done are:

- Change the process or activity so the hazardous product is not required
- Replace it with a safer alternative or form (e.g. a weaker dilution)
- Provide medical surveillance (also referred to in step 6)

If prevention is not reasonably practicable an employer should apply measures to adequately control exposure to a product such as:



- Increase ventilation
- Reduce the number of employees and their level and duration to the exposure
Provide warning signs
- Provide PPE (personal protective equipment) such as gloves, face masks, respirators, etc

Step 4: Ensure that control measures are used and maintained

COSHH requires members of staff to make proper use of control measures and to report defects to their employer. The employer should maintain control measures by examining ventilation, systems of work, quality and effectiveness of PPE and so on, on a regular basis and compile records accordingly. All records must maintain up to date details of all assessments, audits and actions.

Step 5: Monitor exposure

The employer under COSHH must monitor exposure to any hazardous substances being used to ensure:

- Workplace exposure limits are not exceeded
- Control measures are working properly
- Maintain monitoring records

Step 6: Carry out appropriate health surveillance

Where necessary, health surveillance might be required which could involve examination by a doctor or trained nurse. In some cases trained supervisors can undertake this surveillance, for example, by checking employees' skin for dermatitis. The employer should keep up to date records for health surveillance.

Step 7: Prepare plans and procedures to deal with accidents, incidents and emergencies

Where a work activity gives rise to a risk of an accident, incident or emergency, which goes well beyond the risks associated with normal day to day work, the employer should prepare appropriate plans and procedures in advance to respond to an accident or emergency involving a hazardous substance.



Step 8: Ensure that employees are properly informed, trained and supervised

COSHH requires that that employer provides suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training to employees that should include:

- The names of the substances being used, and the possible risks associated with exposure
- Easy access to material safety data sheets that apply to these substances (see MSDS section below)
- The main findings of risk assessments
- The precautions they should take to protect themselves and other employees
- How to use personal protective equipment and clothing provided
- Results of exposure monitoring
- Emergency procedures which need to be followed
- Inform first aiders of actions to be taken in an emergency

Version Update: January 2012