

Skin Hazards

WHY THIS MATTERS

Occupational skin diseases are the second most common type of work-related illness. In 2018, BLS reported 25,000 recordable skin diseases — more than respiratory illnesses. Over 13 million U.S. workers are exposed to chemicals absorbable through skin (NIOSH). Contact dermatitis accounts for 90–95% of all occupational skin disease, and 80% of cases present as hand dermatitis.

25,000

Recordable occupational skin diseases in 2018 (BLS)

13M+

U.S. workers exposed to skin-absorbable chemicals (NIOSH)

90%

Of occupational skin disease is contact dermatitis

5 Rules for Skin Hazard Prevention

Every worker exposed to skin hazards must follow these rules:

- 1 WEAR PROPER GLOVES**
Match glove material to the chemical — nitrile, neoprene, butyl rubber. Latex alone is not enough.
- 2 USE BARRIER CREAMS BEFORE WORK**
Apply barrier cream to exposed skin before contact — it's easier to prevent than to treat.
- 3 WASH SKIN PROMPTLY AFTER CONTACT**
Use mild soap and water — never use solvents, gasoline or turpentine to clean your skin.
- 4 INSPECT YOUR SKIN DAILY**
Check hands, arms and face for redness, cracking, blisters or rash. Report changes early.
- 5 KNOW YOUR SDS SKIN HAZARDS**
Read Section 2 and 8 of the Safety Data Sheet — it tells you the skin hazard and PPE required.

Before You Start — Quick Checklist

- Are the correct chemical-resistant gloves available?
- Is barrier cream applied to exposed skin?
- Do you know which chemicals you'll be handling?
- Is a skin-safe wash station nearby?
- Have you read the SDS for skin hazard information?
- Are you watching for early signs of dermatitis?

Types of Occupational Skin Hazards

Irritant Dermatitis: Caused by solvents, acids, cement, detergents — redness, cracking, dryness. 80% of occupational skin disease.

Allergic Dermatitis: Immune reaction to nickel, epoxy, latex, poison ivy — can develop after years of exposure.

Chemical Burns: Strong acids, bases and reactive chemicals cause immediate burns — flush with water for 20 min.

Sun/UV Exposure: Outdoor workers risk skin cancer from prolonged UV exposure — use sunscreen SPF 30+ and cover up.

Wet Work: Prolonged water/moisture contact breaks down skin barrier — dry hands, change wet gloves regularly.

Biological Hazards: Bacteria, fungi, parasites from soil, animals or contaminated water — wear gloves and wash thoroughly.

Common Mistakes That Damage Skin

- ✗ Using solvents to clean skin — gasoline, turpentine and acetone strip protective oils and cause dermatitis
- ✗ Skipping gloves because "I'll only touch it for a second" — chemical absorption is instant
- ✗ Ignoring early redness or cracking — untreated dermatitis becomes chronic and harder to heal
- ✗ Not matching glove type to the chemical — the wrong glove gives a false sense of protection

Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ Barrier cream before, mild soap after — protect your skin's natural defenses
- ✓ Match gloves to the hazard — check the SDS Section 8 for the correct glove material
- ✓ Report any skin changes early — cracking, redness, itching or blisters get worse without treatment
- ✓ Outdoor workers: sunscreen SPF 30+, long sleeves and a hat are your skin cancer prevention plan

Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. What chemicals do we handle that can be absorbed through skin?
2. Are we using the correct glove type for each chemical?
3. Has anyone on the team experienced work-related skin irritation?
4. Do we have barrier cream and mild soap available on site?
5. When was the last time you checked the SDS for skin hazard information?

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: _____

Supervisor: _____

Project: _____

Location: _____

Attendance sheet attached: [] Yes