



## Working with timber treatment chemicals

This bulletin describes the hazards of the chemicals used in the timber preservation industry and the precautions you must take while using them.

### HOW CHEMICALS CAN AFFECT YOUR HEALTH

Contact with the chemicals used to treat timber may cause:

- Irritation of the nasal linings and lungs,
- Skin rashes and dermatitis,
- Irritation and burning of the eyes.

Unless precautions are taken, these can lead to more serious conditions, such as ulcers.

Over-exposure to chemicals may also damage internal organs like the kidneys or liver, as well as the brain and nervous system, and lead to certain types of cancer.

Chemicals can get into the body by:

- Inhaling fine mists, dusts (including contaminated soil) or vapours.
- Swallowing (this includes transferring chemicals from your hands to your mouth while eating, chewing gum or smoking).
- Direct contact with the skin (you don't need cuts on your skin for this to happen)..

### KNOW THE CHEMICALS YOU ARE USING

When working with any timber treatment chemical, it is important to:

- Know what chemical you are using.
- Know what its harmful effects are.
- Know what special precautions are needed.
- Know what the symptoms of over-exposure are.

You can get this information from Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), which are provided by the chemical supplier. Every timber treatment plant should have a MSDS for each chemical product used on site.

### PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

- Wash all chemical splashes from your skin immediately with soap and water.

- Wash your hands and face before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Don't eat or drink in the work area, or keep food or drink there.
- Don't smoke in the work area.
- If possible, shower before you change into your street clothes.

### PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

Correct protective clothing and equipment must be worn whenever you work with timber preservatives and antisapstains or handle freshly treated timber.

#### Overalls

Wear full-length overalls made from cotton, cotton-polyester blends, or other absorbent fabric. These materials can absorb small splashes of liquids and keep them off your skin. All workers should have two pairs of overalls.

Where you could be exposed to liquid preservatives or to sludges, wear full-length PVC or similar overalls.

#### Apron

If handling wet treated timber, wear a waterproof PVC or neoprene apron of the bib type which extends below the knees.

#### Gloves

If working with water-borne preservatives, wear PVC gloves. If working with organic solvents or creosote, your gloves should be made of neoprene.

Elbow-length gloves are recommended whenever liquid preservatives are used. Every worker should have two pairs of gloves.

#### Safety footwear

Wear safety shoes or boots. If working in wet conditions, your safety footwear must be waterproof. CCA preservatives attack natural rubber. If you use these chemicals, footwear should be made of synthetic rubber or PVC.

#### Safety glasses or goggles

Wear safety glasses or goggles whenever you work with chemicals. For added protection from liquid splashes, wear a full face shield.

## Respirator

This is necessary when toxic substances may be inhaled in harmful concentrations. If you're unsure when and where to wear a respirator, get advice from your supervisor, an OSH inspector or health protection officer, or an occupational health nurse.

An orinasal respirator is only effective when fitted with the correct filter(s) or cartridge and the filter or cartridge are still "fresh". Once fitted, a filter or cartridge has a limited life span, whether it's being used or not.

## Sunscreen

Creosote makes the skin more sensitive to sunlight and increases the risk of sunburn and skin cancer.

If you work with creosote outdoors, apply an ultra-block sunscreen to your hands, arms and any other parts of your body exposed to creosote splashes and sunlight.

## Hearing protection

If working in a noisy environment, wear ear muffs or ear plugs. You should get advice from an occupational health nurse or other professional, as it is important to use the correct grade and type of hearing protection device.

Don't share protective clothing or equipment with another person unless it has been thoroughly cleaned between use.

## CARE OF PROTECTIVE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

- Overalls should be laundered at least once a week. Your employer should be responsible for this. Don't wash your own overalls at home.
- Don't wear torn or holed clothing. Return it to the store for replacement or repair.
- Check your gloves every day for holes, cracks or signs of wear. Replace as necessary.
- Wash gloves inside and out at the end of work and hang them up to dry for 36 hours or longer. Wear your two pairs of gloves on alternate days.
- Keep all protective clothing and equipment in the locker.
- Thoroughly clean your respirator before putting it away in your locker. Washing with warm soapy water is recommended.
- Remember, the most important part of your respirator is the filter or canister. Replace filter(s) or canister:
  - After the period of use recommended by the supplier.
  - If you have difficulty in breathing.
  - If you notice a metallic or "chemical" taste or smell while using it.
  - If it shows any sign of damage.

## FIRST AID

### If chemicals are inhaled

Remove the person to fresh air. Clear the air passages. Start artificial respiration if the person is not breathing.

### Splashes on skin

Wash the affected area with soap or specialist cleansers and cold water. Don't rub harshly or scrub. If clothing is drenched, use the emergency shower and take off all contaminated clothing under the shower. Badly contaminated clothing must be laundered or disposed of.

### Splashes in eyes

Immediately flush gently with water for at least 15 minutes. Hold the eyes open while doing this. Get medical attention for all corrosive chemical splashes and if pain or discomfort persists after any chemical splash in the eyes.

If a patient wears contact lenses, immediately flush the eye and contact lens with water for 15 minutes. Sometimes the lens may not wash out of the eye. If this happens, it can be removed later by the patient or by a medically trained person. Don't try to remove it yourself.

### If chemicals are swallowed

Get medical help at once. While waiting, give the patient about 500 mls of milk or water unless they are unconscious, having convulsions or cannot swallow.

### Additional emergency advice

Contact the National Poisons and Hazardous Chemicals Information Centre. Phone (03) 474 0999 (24-hour service).

## ENTERING CONFINED SPACES

Entering any confined space such as a tank or vat is extremely dangerous. Never attempt it without proper planning, training, protective equipment and authorisation from your employer.

## MEDICAL CHECKUPS

Workers who apply timber treatment chemicals should have regular medical checkups (this doesn't apply to those who work with dry treated timber). Discuss this with your occupational health nurse or GP. Your employer should meet the cost of checkups.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information or advice, ask your employer, your health and safety representative, an OSH inspector or health protection officer, or an occupational health nurse.