

COSHH Notes for SVT Members

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

COSHH is the law that requires employers to control substances that are hazardous to health. It includes all potentially harmful substances that are used, manufactured or produced by a business or organisation that could cause harm to employees, contractors and other people.

Sometimes substances are easily recognised as harmful. Common substances such as paint, bleach or dust from natural materials may also be harmful. Other substances may also be harmful and a risk assessment of every substance used within the work/patient environment should be carried out.

The legal responsibility for performing a COSHH assessment is with the employer and you should work with your Trust's Health and Safety Department in performing a risk assessment and developing safe practice policies.

Vascular Laboratories do not usually contain a large number of substances that are either hazardous or non-hazardous to health, however, it is important to consider all substances that might be present and to perform a risk assessment. Some common examples would include ultrasound gel, T-Spray, alcohol wipes, other cleaning agents, gas cylinders etc. If your workplace is involved in research projects there may well be other substances that need to be considered.

It is important to follow your Trust's policy on all matters associated with infection control and the disposal of soiled and waste materials.

Before you start your COSHH assessment, you need to think about:

- What do you do that involves hazardous substances?
- How can these cause harm?
- How can you reduce the risk of harm occurring?

Always try to prevent exposure at source. For example:

- Can you avoid using a hazardous substance or use a safer process – preventing exposure, eg using water-based rather than solvent-based products, applying by brush rather than spraying?
- Can you substitute it for something safer – eg swap an irritant cleaning product for something milder, or using a vacuum cleaner rather than a brush?
- Can you use a safer form, eg: can you use a solid rather than liquid to avoid splashes or a waxy solid instead of a dry powder to avoid dust?

If you can't prevent exposure, you need to control it adequately by applying the principles of good control practice.

Control is adequate when the risk of harm is 'as low as is reasonably practicable'.

This means:

- All control measures are in good working order.
- Exposures are below the Workplace Exposure Limit, where one exists.
- Exposure to substances that cause cancer, asthma or genetic damage is reduced to as low a level as possible.

Steps to making a COSHH assessment:

- Walk around your workplace. Where is there potential for exposure to substances that might be hazardous to health?
- Examples include processes that emit dust, fume, vapour, mist or gas; and skin contact with liquids, pastes and dusts. Substances with workplace exposure limits (WELs) are hazardous to health.
- In what way are the substances harmful to health?
- Get safety data sheets.
- Some substances arise from processes and procedures and have no safety data sheet. Substances associated with infection control procedures fall into this category.
- What jobs or tasks lead to exposure? Note these down.
- Note down what control measures you already use.
- For these jobs, how likely is any harm to workers' health?
- Are there any areas of concern, eg: from the Accident Book?

HSE Has provided specific guidance on COSHH assessment called *A step by step guide to COSHH assessment*. You can apply this to substances hazardous to health. More detailed guidance is in the free booklet on working with substances hazardous to health. *Working with substances hazardous to health: What you need to know about COSHH. INDG136 PDF*

This may be found on the COSHH website which also has more information.
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/>

Safety Data Sheets

Safety data sheets provide information on substances that are 'dangerous for supply'. Other substances should have instructions for safe use.

You should obtain the Safety Data Sheets for every substance you use in the Vascular Laboratory.

We have included Safety Data Sheets for some of the commonly found substances in the Vascular Laboratory below.

Note that having a Safety Data Sheet is not the same as performing a risk assessment. The data sheet should help to inform you in making your own assessment and managing any risk.

prepared by
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