

Safe Use of Chemicals – (COSHH)

The basics – what you need to know

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1. Introduction

Employers are required to assess and address any risk to the health, safety and welfare of staff, service users, pupils and contractors and those who may be affected by our actions.

2. Scope

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People at work can encounter a wide range of substances capable of damaging their health. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002 (COSHH) specifies essential requirements and a sensible step-by-step approach for the control of hazardous substances and for protecting people exposed to them.

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3. The why, what and how

Where substances that fall within the COSHH regime have to be used managers are required to carry out a risk assessment to ensure such substances are used safely to prevent or control the risk of exposure.

A risk assessment should cover specific actions and events, such as its use, storage and maintenance, use of personal protective equipment, monitoring of exposure and health surveillance, together with the legal need to provide suitable information, instruction and supervision.

Before carrying out risk assessments on a product you will first need to obtain a copy of the Safety Data Sheet from the Manufacturer. If the product has an Occupational Exposure limit (OEL) you will also have to refer to guidance in 'EH40' where these substances are listed.

There may be even specific advice on special products - for which you are advised to consult with your Directorate Health and Safety Adviser, or for health surveillance contact KCC Occupational Health.

Further guidance on carrying out risk assessments, Safety Data Sheets and Occupational exposure limits can be found in Frequency Asked Questions.

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4. **Associated procedures and documentation**

Listed below are related topics within SafetyNet. To read the topics select the links.

The documentation listed below refers to Legislation and Industry Standards. To read these in greater detail select the website links and type in the name of the document you require.

➤ **Topics**

[Managing Health and Safety](#)

[Universal Precautions for the Control of Infection](#)

[Risk Assessment](#)

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➤ **Documentation**

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

[Link to the HSE website](#)

[Link to the HMSO website](#)

[Link to the DfES website](#)

5. **Frequently Asked Questions**

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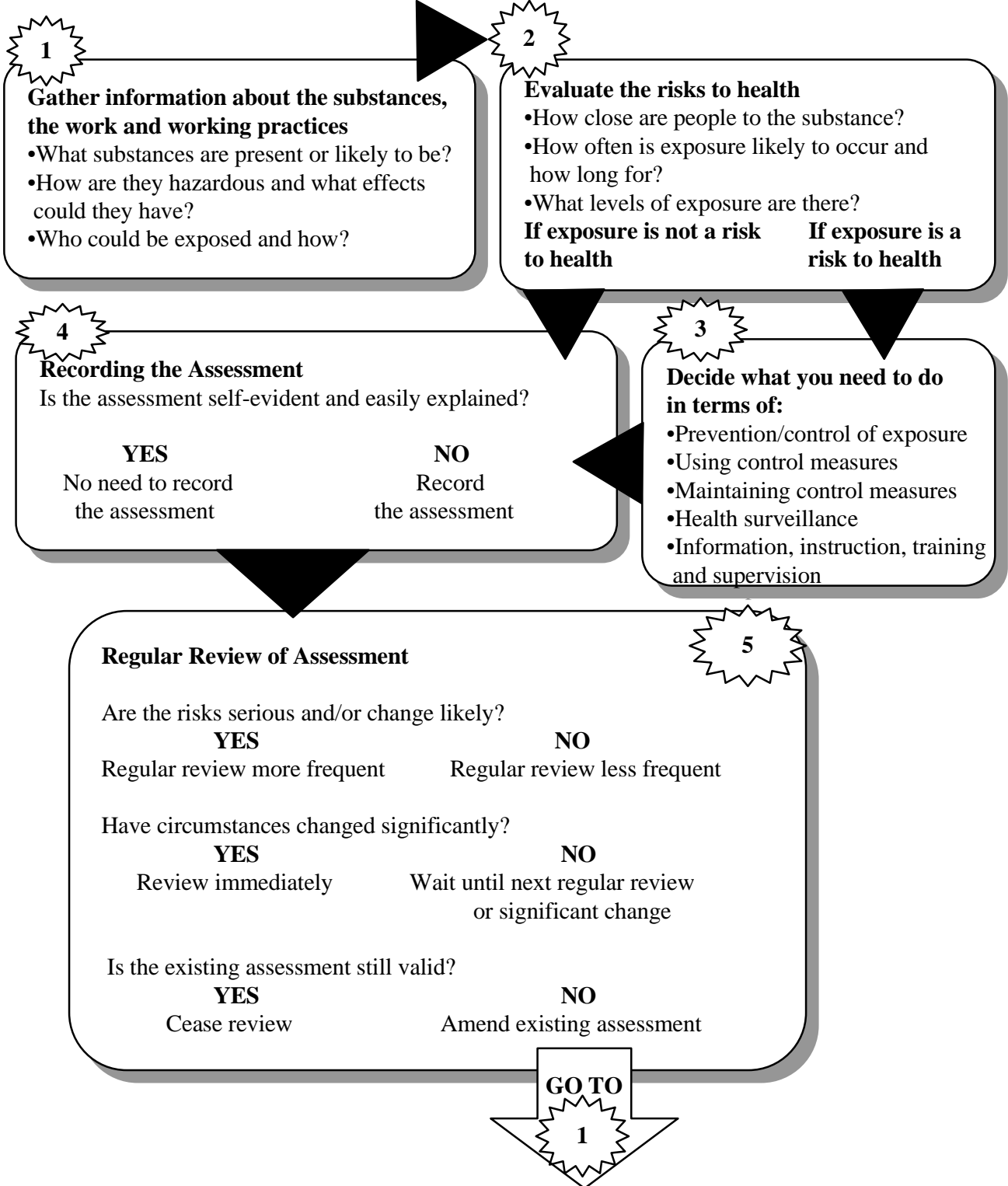
What is a Substance Hazardous to Health?

Substances that are hazardous to health include those labelled as dangerous (i.e. very toxic, toxic, harmful, irritant or corrosive) including agricultural pesticides and substances with occupational exposure limits. They could also include harmful micro-organisms and substantial quantities of dust and indeed any material, mixture or compound used at work, or arising from work activities which can harm people's health.

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How do I carry out a Risk Assessment?

The following is a five step guidance for assessing substances hazardous to health.



What is an Occupational Exposure Limit?

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Simply explained it is the time limit any individual should be exposed to certain substances, otherwise they are likely to be harmed. These substances are listed in the document entitled "EH40" which is produced annually by HSE.

It is unlikely that most establishments will have such substances, and those that do will (and should have) in their possession the latest EH40 document.

If any establishment believes that it may have substances that cause harm, they should

seek advice from their local directorate Health and Safety Adviser in respect of its care and use.

What is a Safety Data Sheet?

Manufacturers have to provide adequate information about the article provided so that it will be safe and can be used and stored without risk to health.

There is no standard design to these documents, however, specific information should always be shown.

Example: Safety Data Sheet

Substance: *Substance name and any synonyms*

Ref:

Supplier's name & address: *Suppliers name or sometimes a contact point in the event of an emergency*

Components

WEL's*

Workplace Exposure Limited

Major or significant components of product

Dangerous substances supply category: *Category of product, i.e. toxic, flammable.*

Physical appearance/odour: *Description in everyday words (non-technical).*

Hazards: *Sometimes a highly detailed description of hazards of the product is shown, often very technical.*

Suitable Protective Equipment: *Details of items needed when handling product.*

Storage: *Special storage requirements.*

Spillage Procedures: *Actions (sometimes telephone number) to be taken.*

First Aid Procedures: *Procedures to follow in the event of chemical exposure.*

* WEL's: Adequate control of exposure with good practice advice.

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What shall I do when purchasing a new Substance?

If you purchase a new product/substance it is always advisable to ask the supplier/manufacturer for a COSHH data sheet in respect of that product. Then having read the document:

Identify key indicators

Carry out your risk assessment

Place a copy of the data sheet in a suitable place readily available for any emergencies that may arise in respect of that product.