

Safety Topic

Safety News

State Compensation Insurance Fund



Issue Four, 2008

Dermatitis

Occupational dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin that results from exposure to an irritant on the job.

The irritant can be chemical, mechanical, physical, or biological. How the skin responds to the irritant varies by the type of skin (pigmentation, dryness, hairiness), age, sex, season of the year, history of skin disease or allergy, and personal hygiene. A reaction can occur from one exposure

or from long or repeated exposures. But no matter how or where it occurs, it is much easier to prevent than to cure.

There are two kinds of dermatitis: contact dermatitis – when the irritant causes an immediate, one-time reaction, and sensitization dermatitis – when the reaction is delayed from several hours to several months.



- **Chemicals**, producing burns or mild skin irritation, are the most frequent cause of dermatitis.
- **Mechanical** causes include friction, pressure, and trauma resulting in abrasions, wounds, bruises, or foreign bodies (like glass fiber) getting into the skin. Physical agents leading to dermatitis are excessive heat, cold, sunlight, ultraviolet light, X-rays or other ionizing radiation.
- **Biological agents** such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, poisonous plants, and insects can cause or complicate occupational dermatitis.

What can be done to prevent or lessen the chance of developing dermatitis? Personal cleanliness is one of the best preventive measures. Wash your hands often with a mild, non-abrasive soap and immediately wash any skin area that's been exposed to an irritating substance.

Eliminate skin contact with irritating substances or substitute less toxic and irritating ones where possible. Engineering controls, such as enclosures, guards or mechanical handling devices, can help minimize contact with hazardous substances. Protective clothing and equipment, including aprons, eye and face shields, finger cots, gloves, and chemical-resistant clothing can also help, if they are kept clean and in good

repair. Laundering procedures should be maintained to ensure that irritating materials are removed from clothing and not taken home. Protective creams, when used properly, provide some protection.

The most important thing an employer can do is establish an employee education program so that workers who may be exposed to skin irritants are informed about the hazards, understand the precautions, and know what processes or equipment to use to avoid or minimize exposure. □

TOPIC REVIEW

Instructor _____

Date _____

Location _____

Attended By _____

Safety Recommendations



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News about Occupational Safety and Health in Manufacturing

Issue Four, 2008

Employer Education Series

State Fund continues to promote community educational outreach by increasing the quantity and frequency of employer seminars. These seminars are produced and sponsored by State Fund and are open to State Fund policyholders. The seminar topics cover all aspects of worker's compensation and are offered statewide.

As part of State Fund's Employer Education Series, the local State Fund Loss Control departments offer safety seminars dedicated to loss prevention. They feature safety training targeted to specific industries and safety topics of interest to California employers. Various programs in the series are developed in conjunction with State Fund insured Group Programs and external affiliates and partners. Some of these partners are occupational safety and health providers such as Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, the Department of Health Services, and the University of California.

The goal of State Fund's Employer Education Series is to present valuable information from recognized safety and health experts to enable employers to reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, facilitate regulatory compliance, and increase business profits.

The program venues provide the opportunity for attendees to have their workplace safety questions immediately and personally answered by industry experts. The typically half-day seminars are usually held at regional State Fund offices. To learn what programs are scheduled in your area, visit www.scif.com and click on Seminars. □

Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. □

This Manufacturing Safety News is produced by the Safety and Health Services Department of State Fund to assist clients in their loss control efforts. Information or recommendations contained in this publication were obtained from sources believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is only advisory and does not presume to be exhaustive or inclusive of all workplace hazards or situations. Permission to reprint articles subject to approval by State Compensation Insurance Fund.

Published by State Compensation Insurance Fund Safety and Health Services Department. Editor: Judy Kerry

Safety News

ISSUE FOUR,
2008

STATE COMPENSATION INSURANCE FUND

Watch Out For Forklifts

Forklifts are heavy, so when a worker is injured by a forklift vehicle the injury is often serious and sometimes fatal. To avoid becoming a victim of a forklift accident, be constantly aware of forklift activities around you both in your immediate work area and in other areas of the workplace. And, always give a forklift PLENTY of room to maneuver.

Forklifts don't maneuver like automobiles. They're steered from the rear wheels, so their rear end swings out wider than an automobile's pathway and their extra weight means they can't stop as fast as an auto. So, don't try to squeeze by an operating forklift; their unexpected movements can crush you between the vehicle and a stationary object.

Forklifts have limited visibility. The forks, load, and lifting mechanism block the line of sight for the driver. So, it's up to YOU, to watch for and avoid forklifts. Don't rely on the forklift driver to see you. If you MUST move around near an active forklift, maintain eye contact with the driver at all times.

Never stand near or under loaded forklift tines/forks. Forklifts can drop their load or knock

over a stack of materials, causing a possible caught/crush injury. Always wait until a forklift is idle and the parking brake is ON, before entering an active forklift zone. Evaluate work areas around you to ensure that forklift activities can't impact you. For example, a forklift in one aisle can push a product off a shelf from

that side of the aisle into the adjacent aisle you may be in and crush you.

Listen carefully and look both ways before you step out from an aisle, around a corner, or across a pathway. Avoid crossing in front of a moving forklift and don't try to "beat" one to a crossing. Install mirrors in blind entry areas to help pedestri-

ans and forklift drivers keep track of each other. Paint wide, safe pathways on work area floors to separate pedestrians from forklift travels zones. Adequate lighting can also ensure that drivers and pedestrians see each other.

Finally, stay alert and work at a safe pace; distracted or hurrying workers and quick paced forklift driving can lead to an accident or injury. If there are forklifts present where you work, think about your surroundings and how you can keep yourself safe from a forklift injury. □



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The Expert's Corner

Everything In Its Place

One of the first things to be sacrificed to increased production is good housekeeping – clear aiseways, orderly workstations, and efficient disposal of waste. While it is not uncommon to see these priorities fall by the wayside as a business grows, it is important that they be re-implemented for safety, efficiency, and productivity.

Unclutter the Aisleways

Keeping aisleways clear and clean reduces the risk of injury due to slips, trips, falls, and overexertion. Production waste – such as grease, fibers, sawdust, and other particulates – contributes to the occurrence of slip and fall injuries. Reduced friction between the employee's shoes and walking surface also increases the physical demand of material handling tasks. A regular schedule for cleaning up production waste should be established and monitored.

Larger obstructions – such as boxes and tools – contribute to the occurrence of trip and fall injuries. Such obstructions can cause an employee to take a longer route to

place a load. This increases the duration of the push, pull, or carry exertion, reducing efficiency and productivity and increasing the risk of physical injury. Obstructions closer to the beginning or end of the task may cause the employee to complete it by using an awkward posture – bending forward or twisting at the waist. Handling



a load in these awkward postures increases the risk of low back injury. Make sure that adequate space is provided for storage of inventory and tools and have a supervisor periodically check for obstructed aisleways.

Keep Workstations Clear

Individual workstations should be kept

clear and clean to reduce the risk of injury due to extended reaches and other awkward postures. Extended reaches create additional loads on the shoulder and low back. Shadow boards contain outlines of designated tools to show where they should be stored and can be used to maintain efficient placement of tools and equipment within desired reaching zones. Frequently used items should be within 16" and other items within 27".

Reduce Demands of Waste Disposal

Solid garbage cans can create a suction force between the bag and the can. Lifting a bag out of a solid can often causes the worker to handle the load with hands above shoulder height. An open frame receptacle can be used to hold the bag, eliminating the suction force and allowing the bag to be slid out of the side rather than lifted overhead.

Ryan Horton is an Ergonomics Consultant with State Fund. □

Stop Me If I'm Repeating Myself

Your job may require you to grip and release, bend and twist, or push and pull many times during the day. But over time, those repeated actions could cause damage to muscles, tendons, or nerves. Early damage may be so slight that it heals with rest, often overnight. But when those muscles, tendons, or nerves can't rest long enough to heal, the condition may worsen and result in painful, disabling injuries called "musculoskeletal disorders" or MSDs.

Any extreme position puts pressure on muscles,

tendons, and nerves. Even "good positions" can be harmful if they're held too long. You work safest and your motions are strongest when your hands and wrist are in a straight (neutral) position.

MSDs rarely have a dramatic beginning. In fact, it may take a long time before symptoms appear. But repeated wear and tear over time can eventually cause damage. Three factors affect MSDs – position, force, and repetition. If you adjust these factors as you work, you can decrease the likelihood of

developing an MSD injury.

The best position is to stand or sit with the work process waist high so your hands, wrists, and forearms can move straight out from your body with your wrists supported and your elbows kept in close to your waist. You may need to slant the work surface toward you to position the task within reach.

Force is the pressure or strain put on muscles and tendons when you grip, push, pull or

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The Hidden Cost Of Accidents

For ship captains in arctic waters, icebergs are a major concern. They know that below the surface of the iceberg's tip lies an unseen force with the potential to sink a ship and all its crew. Like an iceberg, workplace accidents contain hidden (or indirect) costs with the potential to sink a company by draining its profits. One way to prevent workplace accidents and the impact of their resulting costs is to create and maintain an effective safety and loss prevention program.

The visible or direct costs of an accident are obvious when the medical costs, compensation payments, and insurance premium are calculated. These costs are generally paid by the insurance company using premium dollars and some employers consider these costs "part of doing business." But these direct costs are just the tip of the accident expense iceberg. Studies show that for every dollar of direct costs there are many more dollars in indirect costs, the hidden, uninsured cost of accidents.

Many companies are unaware of the underlying cost repercussion generated by a single accident because those expenses may not be immediately obvious. Indirect costs vary greatly from case to

case and are not easily identified. They're often less predictable and therefore, more difficult to control. These hidden costs are ultimately paid for out of company profits. Indirect costs include:

- Time lost wages
- Lost productivity and revenue
- Disrupted work schedules
- Training new workers
- Damaged to material or equipment
- Overhead paid during work disruption
- Lost customers or sales
- Litigation fees or fines



Keep your company afloat. Look at your business. See where accidents are likely to occur. Be proactive in preventing workplace

accidents by establishing a safety program that educates workers in accident and injury prevention. Every accident that's prevented will save your company money – money that will remain in profits. An ongoing safety program is your best protection against the financial impact of a workplace accident. □

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rotate. If your tools are sharp and in good repair, they'll require less force to use. The size, texture or padding of a tool can also affect your grip and handling ease. In some cases, properly fitted gloves, finger cots, or tape can increase friction and reduce force.

Contact force occurs when a body part is pressed against a hard surface- such as a tool handle, lever or worktable. Combine force with a harmful

position and the risk of muscle fatigue or injury increases. Use your whole hand or as much of your hand as possible when grasping a tool or object.

Repetitions can be reduced if you can alternate your work tasks or change the way you do them. This allows different muscles a chance to rest. Reduce the likelihood of developing work-related MSDs by becoming aware of what you're doing, how you're doing it, and how long you're doing it. □

Warm Up

Working in cold conditions can result in cold stress or hypothermia which can negatively affect worker health and safety. Construction workers can develop cold stress when working outdoors on a cold day; in an unheated building; in cold water, rain, or snow; or while handling cold objects or materials.

Once the body loses its ability to maintain a normal temperature, the body temperature lowers, and symptoms such as violent shivering, dehydration, numbness, frostbite, or immersion foot (trench foot), slow or slurred speech, confusion, hallucinations, a weak and irregular pulse, or unconsciousness can occur. Manual dexterity also decreases with cold and can result in unsafe work practices.

Employers can protect workers from cold stress by providing training, controlling temperature and wind when possible by using heaters and windbreaks, rotating workers in cold jobs, scheduling work at warmest times, encouraging self-pacing and extra breaks if necessary, establishing a buddy system, and keeping first aid supplies and equipment available. Workers can prevent cold stress by dressing with warm, layered, proper insulated and well-ventilated clothing; seeking warm locations during breaks; and replacing lost fluids with warm, sweet, non-caffeine-containing drinks.

Certain people are more susceptible to cold stress - people who are not physically fit, have a chronic illness, drink alcohol or take drugs (including prescription drugs), are wet or damp from work or weather, are fatigued, are exposed to vibration from tools, don't wear the right clothing, or are not used to working in cold conditions.

By taking the necessary precautions, employers and workers together can minimize the potential for cold stress. □

