



Health & Safety COSHH Policy (for staff carrying out cleaning operations)

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¹ or earlier if change in legislation or on risk assessment

Amendment Control

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1.0	Feb 2023	

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Policy Summary

Cleaning products can contain hazardous chemicals which could be harmful to health. Substances such as detergents, disinfectants, bleach or oven cleaners can cause damage to the health of the user if controls are not in place to limit exposure and protect workers.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) is a set of regulations set up to protect workers from ill health when coming into contact or working with hazardous substances and chemicals.

This includes hazardous chemicals found in cleaning products as well as harmful substances which may have been spilled or released and require cleaning, wiping up or disinfecting. Substances such as flour and dust as well as bodily fluids (blood, faeces, urine, saliva and vomit) are all covered by the COSHH Regulations.

It is the university's responsibility to ensure that risks arising from working with these hazardous substances are identified and control measures are in place in order to eliminate or reduce any risk.

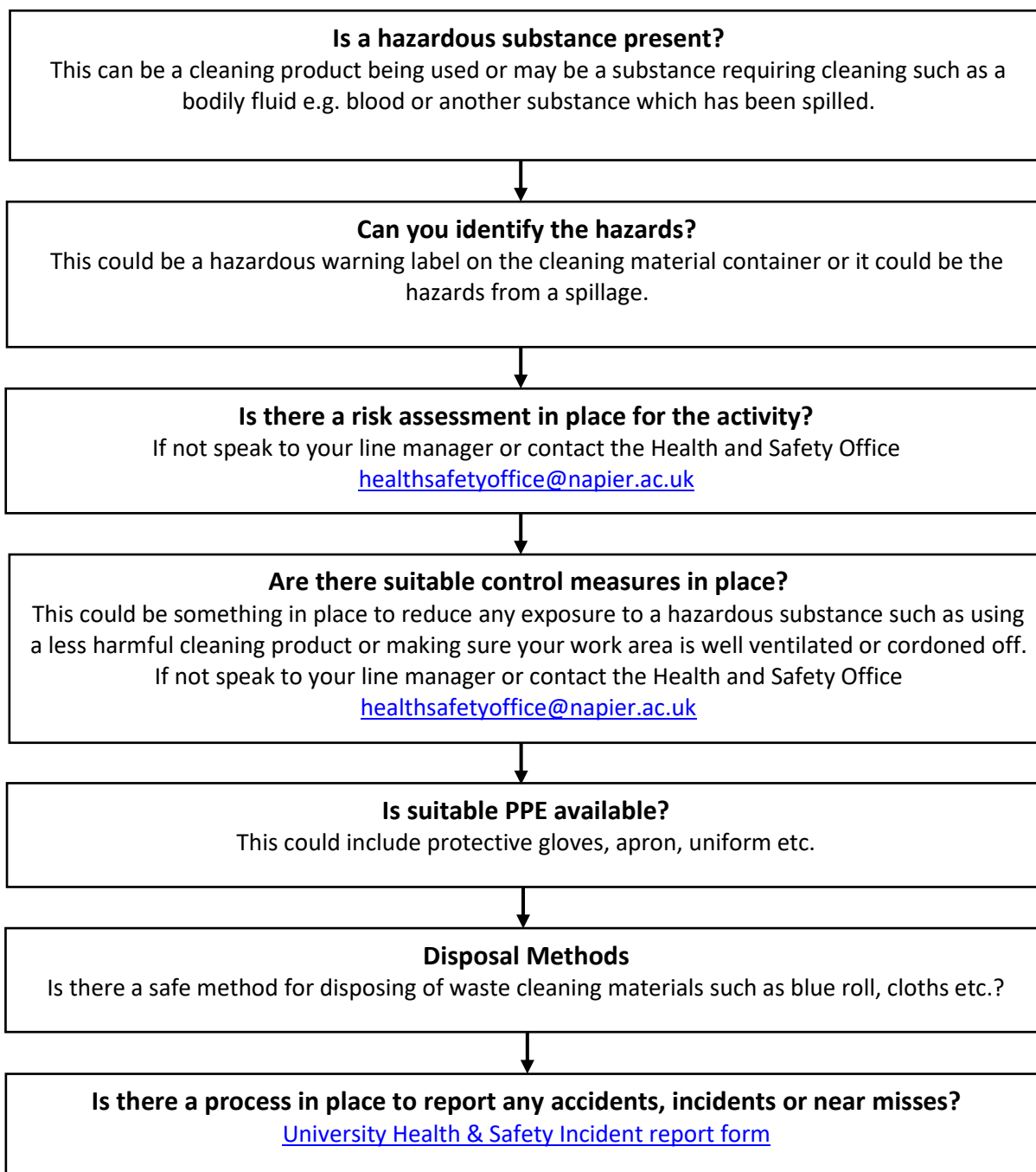
This policy is aimed at cleaners and other staff who may be working with cleaning materials or are dealing with spillages of substances which could, potentially, be hazardous to health.

This policy contains information regarding COSHH Regulations and guidance on how to reduce risk and work safely.

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Cleaning Operations – Hazardous Substances Flowchart



1. Introduction

COSHH stands for the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health and is a set of regulations put in place to protect workers from ill health when working with harmful substances at work. Harmful substances can include cleaning materials such as bleach, solvents, oven and toilet cleaners, antibacterial sprays, detergents, disinfectants and other abrasive cleaning products as well as bodily fluids such as blood, vomit and faeces.

The COSHH Regulations cover all of these materials and also includes other substances which can cause harm such as dusts, fibres and powders plus biological agents such as bacteria and viruses.

The objective of COSHH is to prevent or to control exposure to substances hazardous to health so as to prevent ill health.

The aim of this policy is to provide guidance to all staff working with cleaning materials and other harmful substances that may be hazardous to health and to guide supervisors, managers and staff through the risk assessment process and to help with any control measures required in order to reduce or eliminate risk.

2. Hazardous substances

A hazardous substance is one with the potential to cause harm. The COSHH Regulations are concerned with how hazardous substances can affect workers and how substances might enter the body. The main routes a hazardous substance can affect a worker and enter the body are:

- **Contact**
 - Damage to skin or eyes through touch or spills from corrosive, toxic or volatile substances.
 - Some ingredients in cleaning products can cause skin allergies.
 - Having wet hands for long periods can lead to dermatitis and other skin irritations.
 - Cuts or open wounds can become infected if contact is made with hazardous substances such as blood or other biological agents.

- **Inhalation**
 - Inhalation of certain substances found in cleaning materials could cause nausea, headaches and dizziness.
 - Some ingredients in cleaning products can cause asthma.
 - Damage to lungs can be caused through inhalation of dusts, vapours, gases or mists.

- **Ingestion**
 - Damage to internal organs can be caused through ingestion of poisons or toxic substances.
 - Accidental ingestion of micro-organisms found in bodily fluids could cause infection and ill health.

- **Injection**
 - Damage to internal organs can be caused through injection from a puncture in the skin. This could be from broken glass or a needle.

3. Control measures

Control measures are precautions put in place to reduce the likelihood of exposure to harmful substances and therefore protect the worker from hazards in the workplace. Control measures can range from using a less hazardous cleaning product to wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves or an apron.

The objective of COSHH is to prevent or to control exposure to substances hazardous to health so as to prevent ill health. In order to do this control measures have to be put in place in order to reduce or eliminate risk. Controls can be measured in the order of their effectiveness.

3.1. List of control measures

In order of priority – most effective to least effective – the list of control measures is:

- **Elimination** – Can you remove the hazardous substances completely?
- **Substitution** – Can you substitute the hazardous cleaning material for something less harmful, or can you dilute the cleaning material? Is it still as effective for cleaning purposes?
- **Engineering controls** – Can you use equipment to keep cleaning staff (and any other individuals in the area) away from hazardous materials or at least minimise any contact?
- **Administrative controls** – Safe systems of work. This can include written instructions on how to complete a job safely (SOP – Standard Operating Procedure) and can also include training for staff. All cleaning staff (and staff working with cleaning materials) should be trained in working with hazardous substances.
- **PPE** – Personal Protective Equipment such as gloves and aprons/coveralls must be worn when working with hazardous cleaning materials.

It is important to ensure the following:

- Any control measures in place are being used correctly.
- Any control measures are working correctly.
- That information, instruction and training, where appropriate, is passed on to any workers exposed to hazardous substances.
- That monitoring and health surveillance are provided in appropriate cases.
- That any potential leaks or accidental spillages are prepared for.

3.2. Cleaning materials/cleaning agents

Some ingredients present in cleaning materials can cause skin allergies and asthma. Some substances are corrosive and can burn the skin and the eyes.

- **Bleach** – Most household bleach contains chlorine. Exposure to low levels of chlorine can result in nose, throat and eye irritation. Bleach is corrosive which means it can irritate or burn your skin and eyes. Vapours from bleach are irritating to the eyes and respiratory system.
- **Disinfectant sprays** – Disinfectant sprays can cause skin irritation or an allergic skin reaction. They can also cause respiratory irritation. Can be harmful if the spray is inhaled.

- **Detergents** – contact with skin may cause burns and/or irritation with redness and swelling. Can be harmful if inhaled.
- **Solvent cleaners** – Solvent cleaners such as degreasers may contain flammable substances such as alcohol or acetone. Solvents can cause irritation to the skin (dermatitis) as well as irritation to the eyes, mouth and nose.
- **Acids and Alkalis** - Some cleaning products contain acid (metal polish, bathroom descalers) or alkali (oven cleaners). Acids and alkalis are both corrosive and can irritate or burn your skin and eyes.

Control measures

Most cleaning products can be used safely with some simple control measures in place such as:

- Changing the process or activity so that the hazardous substance is not required.
- Replacing the substance with a safer alternative.
- Using a scourer, hot water and a milder detergent.
- Using good work techniques that avoid or minimise contact with harmful substances.
- Good work techniques can also help minimise leaks and avoid spills.
- Storing cleaning products safely.
- Practicing good hand care – remove contamination promptly, wash hands properly, dry thoroughly and use skin creams regularly.
- Keeping the workplace well ventilated.
- Wearing PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) – for some tasks PPE such as protective gloves, aprons and eye protection may be required.
- Faults with control measures or control measures not working properly should be remedied immediately or reported to your line manager or supervisor.
- Small cuts on hands and fingers should be covered by a waterproof plaster to avoid infection. Gloves should be worn.

3.3. Bodily fluids

- Substances such as blood, faeces, urine, vomit and saliva are all classed as substances hazardous to health and are covered by the COSHH Regulations.
- Bodily fluids could be a source of infectious micro-organisms including bacteria and viruses. Some of these are extremely harmful such as Hepatitis B or HIV.
- Any spillage of bodily fluids should be treated as potentially infectious and appropriate precautions should be taken.
- Spillages of blood must be decontaminated with an appropriate disinfectant.

Control measures

- Care must be taken when cleaning up any spillages of substances such as blood, urine or vomit.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be worn – gloves, aprons, coveralls etc.
- Staff, involved in any clean ups, should be trained in the management of blood and bodily fluid spills and splashes.
- Spillages must be dealt with as soon as possible and not left.

- Any used gloves or cleaning materials, such as blue roll or paper towels, must be disposed of properly.

▶ **Care must be taken - some cleaning products can be as harmful as any spilled substance requiring cleaning. Control measures must be in place.**

Body spill kits

There may be body spill kits available for use. These are commercially available spill kits with the exact items required to clean up spillages of blood, urine, vomit etc. These should contain:

- Absorbent granules – can be used on a spill site to soak up most liquids
- Disinfectant
- Gloves
- Apron
- Wipes
- Tissues
- Waste bag

Once the bodily fluid has been cleared up any tissues, spent granules, wipes, gloves etc. can be placed in the waste bag for disposal. Even once any spillages have been disinfected and cleared away the area may still require mopping up or cleaning.

3.4. Other substances

- **Dusts and Fibres** – Wiping surfaces can raise fine dusts and fibres which can be breathed in causing irritation. Sometimes this will lead to sneezing and/or coughing but can become more serious causing eye irritation, allergic reactions as well as lung damage and asthma.
- **Flour** – Flour dust is classified as a hazardous substance. Workers may inhale flour dust when it becomes airborne after brushing or sweeping. Flour dust can irritate the respiratory tract. Flour sometimes contains artificial sweeteners, flavourings or colouring. These ingredients can cause further irritation.

Short term exposure to flour dusts can lead to:

- Runny nose, runny eyes
- Wheezing, sneezing and coughing
- Shortness of breath

Long term exposure to flour dust can lead to:

- Irritation to the respiratory tract
- Occupational asthma

Control measures

- Try not to raise dusts – fine dusts can rise in the air and then be inhaled and cause damage to lungs.

- Use good work techniques that avoid or minimise contact with harmful substances such as dusts.
- Good hand care is essential. Make sure you wash and dry your hands thoroughly after wiping up any dusts and fibres.
- Keep the workplace well ventilated if possible. A good extraction system should remove most fine dusts away from any workers.

- ▶ **Care must be taken when wiping up any substances which are classified as hazardous.**
- ▶ **Bodily fluids such as blood, vomit etc. or other substances such as dusts and fibres can potentially cause harm through inhalation, touch or accidental ingestion.**
- ▶ **Cleaning materials used to clean up hazardous substances such as bleach, disinfectant spray or detergents can also be hazardous.**

4. Exposure to hazardous substances

Exposure to hazardous substances in the workplace can have short-term and long-term health effects.

Health effects from exposure to hazardous substances can either be:

- **Acute** (immediate effects are noticeable)
- **Chronic** (effects can materialise over a long period)

Acute exposure (short-term) - effects show up immediately or soon after exposure to the chemical or hazardous substance. They may be minor such as nose or throat irritation or they could be more serious like eye damage or a burn to the skin. The effects will show right away.










Chronic exposure - this refers to repeated or continuous contact with a hazardous substance over a long period of time (months or years), meaning working with and being exposed to a hazardous substance or chemical over a long period could result in long term health issues. Over time long term chronic health effects might include the development of allergies, dermatitis or asthma.

- ▶ **Some effects from hazardous substances can take place over a long period of time from prolonged use.**
- ▶ **It is not always noticeable immediately and can sometimes take years for symptoms to show.**



5. Identifying hazards

Certain substances, such as cleaning products, that are classified as hazardous will have hazard warning labels on the bottle or container.

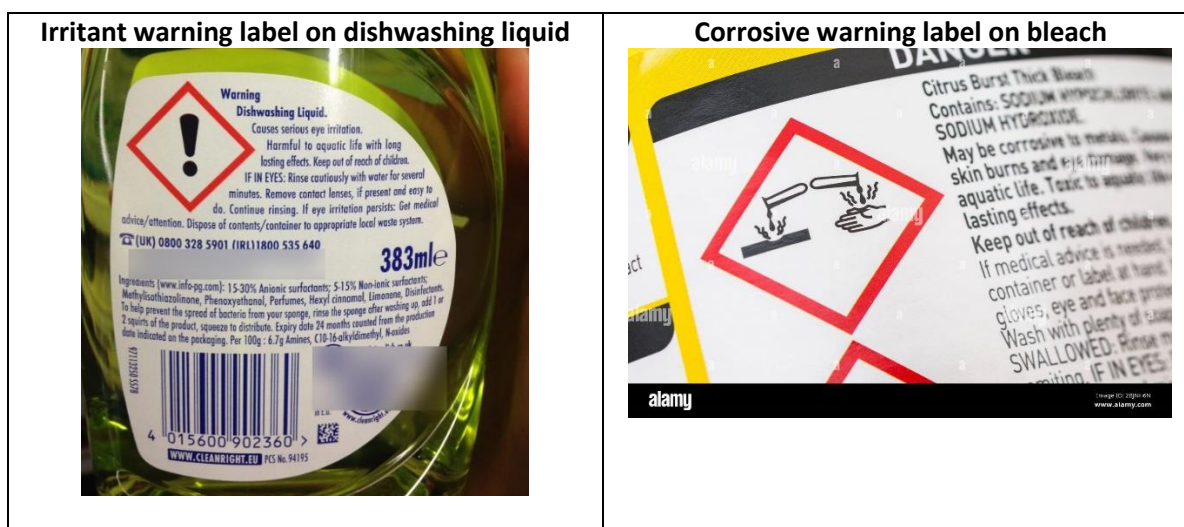
These may look like this:

								
Health Hazard	Toxic	Corrosive	Harmful/Irritant	Flammable	Oxidising	Explosive	Compressed gas	Harmful for the environment

Not all of the above labels will be present on cleaning products. The most common ones will be:

Hazard Symbol	Definition	Cleaning products containing these hazards
	This symbol means the substance is corrosive. The substance can cause burns to the skin and eyes.	Bleach Oven cleaners Drain cleaners
	This symbol means the substance is harmful. The substance can irritate the skin or eyes. Can be harmful if swallowed or inhaled.	Washing up liquid Anti-bacterial spray Disinfectant spray Stain removers Floor cleaners Washing powders

Examples of hazard warning labels on cleaning products:



6. Assessing the risks

It is essential for Schools/Services/Managers/Supervisors to assess the risks present with hazardous substances being used and who is at risk. In order to prevent or reduce the exposure from hazardous substances to workers, managers/supervisors can do the following:

- Identify any hazards
- Identify who is at risk
- Identify how they may be harmed
- Evaluate the risks
- Decide on control measures to reduce or remove the risks
- Review the work regularly to ensure control measures in place are working correctly



Identify hazards – What substances are being used? What are the hazards?

Who is at risk? – Who is working with the hazardous substance? Who else might be affected?

How might they be harmed? – Inhalation? Ingestion? Absorption through skin?

Evaluate risks – How hazardous is the work? Is it Low, Medium or High risk?

Control measures – What control measures are required to reduce or eliminate the risk?

Review – Review any systems or control measures in place to ensure they are working correctly.

7. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the School/Service area to ensure that:

- Any hazards that may be present in the workplace, during cleaning operations, are identified.
- The exposure to hazardous substances is eliminated completely or controlled.
- Control measures are in place to minimise exposure and reduce risk.
- That control measures are monitored and reviewed.
- That exposure levels are monitored and reviewed.
- That the health of staff, students and other individuals who may be exposed to hazardous substances is monitored.
- Any near misses, incidents, accidents and dangerous occurrences with hazardous substances is reported using the [Health and Safety Incident Reporting Form](#).
- Plans for emergencies, incidents and accidents are designed and implemented.

Cleaning staff and other individuals working with hazardous substances in the university have the following responsibilities:

- Use any control measures that have been put in place.
- Report inadequate or defective equipment and/or control measures.
- Make use of, undertake any training and care for, all provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Ensure any disposable PPE such as gloves and any tissues or blue roll are disposed of safely.
- Hands should be cleaned properly following any cleaning activity involving hazardous substances or when gloves or other PPE has been removed.
- Adhere to all training and information provided for you.

8. Training

Any staff working in the university involved in cleaning operations will require training. The training which could be on the job style training should include:

- The safe handling and storage of any cleaning products that contain hazardous substances.
- Guidance of the type of hazards involved and what harm can occur from exposure.
- Knowledge of what to do should there be a spillage or accidental release.
- How to dispose of any waste material including bodily fluids after any clean-up operation has been completed.
- Instruction must be given for the use of any equipment being used and any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) required.

9. Health surveillance

The University has an annual Health Surveillance check in place for employees who may be exposed to hazardous substances.

Hazardous chemicals, such as those found in some cleaning products like bleach, which could come into contact with the skin or through inhalation may pose a risk to a person's health if not properly controlled. In most cases exposure to small quantities of irritant substances will cause harm only if exposure occurs sufficiently frequently.

It is noted, however, that health surveillance may be appropriate even if very small or infrequent exposure to hazardous substances is known to pose a potent risk to health such as may occur with powerful respiratory sensitisers, recognised carcinogens or highly active biological agents or toxins.

The purpose of health surveillance is:

- To enable early identification and diagnosis of work-related conditions in individuals so that additional control measures can be put in place to prevent deterioration and promote recovery.
- To check whether general control measures in place to prevent work related health are adequate.
- To create an opportunity for training and education of employees regarding the risk of specific work-related conditions.