

Chemicals

Your organisation has a legal obligation to provide and maintain a safe environment for your volunteers, customers, and visitors – you can read more on this in the previous sector briefing [Safety Responsibility and Accountability](#).

Under the Duty of Care requirements, you should have processes to identify, control, and monitor risk in place. See [Sector Brief – Managing Safety Risk](#).

A specific risk for workers and visitors to your site is chemicals. This sector briefing covers identifying and controlling the risks associated with chemicals.



1) Risks associated with chemicals

Without the proper controls, chemicals can cause cancer, respiratory illnesses, skin and eye irritations, fire and explosion-related injuries and can cause damage to the environment.

2) Controlling the hazards

You must implement appropriate safety systems in accordance with the hierarchy of controls to eliminate or minimise the risks to health, safety, and the environment from chemicals.

3) Controlling the hazards - Identify

To meet your Duty of Care responsibilities you need to identify where chemicals are being used and/or stored.



TIP

Allocating one person within your organisation to being responsible for the management of chemicals will likely have a better outcome than if it is a shared responsibility. The allocated person should walk your site identifying locations where chemicals are being stored or used.

4) Controlling the hazards – Selecting

When selecting chemicals, you should consider if a less hazardous chemical is available and suitable, e.g., not using petrol as a degreaser, and instead using a non-flammable degreaser. You should also review the Safety Data Sheet, as this provides information on First Aid Measures, Fire Fighting Measures, Accidental Release Measures, Handling & Storage and Disposal.

5) Controlling the hazards – Storage

Chemicals should be stored correctly in accordance with the Safety Data Sheet. It is best to only store quantities in the volume that will be used and purchasing smaller quantities more often, rather than buying and storing large quantities.

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Where larger quantities are ordered, these often require decanting into smaller usable quantities. It's important that the new container clearly identifies the chemical they contain. Never use food containers to store chemicals, as this poses a risk of ingestion.

Solvents and flammable liquids should be stored in a flame-proof cabinet. Depending on your site you may need to lock the cabinet to prevent unauthorised access.

Consider using a bund to store chemicals, especially those chemicals that can cause a risk to the environment. Bunds that are outside are often less effective as they fill with rainwater and need regularly emptying. If you have a bund outside you must regularly check and empty it of rainwater.

6) Controlling the hazards – Use

When using chemicals (including decanting) you must ensure that all risks are identified and mitigated. The safety Data Sheet and product literature will provide guidance on the chemicals correct use.

As a minimum you should keep a copy of the Safety Data Sheet in an accessible location.

Depending on the chemical, risks could include:

- Ignition
- Inhalation of vapours
- Inhalation of dust
- Skin irritation
- Splashes/contact with eyes

Controls should be put in place for each of the identified risks during the chemicals use.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is often used to mitigate the risks associated with using chemicals. These will include eye protection, gloves, and face masks. Again, these will be specified in the Safety Data Sheet.



IMPORTANT

Where a chemical is diluted this should be as per the manufacturer's instructions, it is often more dangerous and wasteful using a stronger dilution.

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7) Controlling the hazards – Spills

You should limit the likelihood of spills, but when they occur they should be cleared up immediately.

You may consider having a spill kit available. These consist of a readily identifiable container which contains sorbent pads, loose absorbents, booms, PPE and contaminated waste bags. They are designed for easy and efficient use, with clear instructions and all items clearly labelled.

A general-purpose spill kit is suitable for most locations, but hydrocarbon and chemical spill kits are available where required. Spill kits are ideal for use in industrial and commercial settings, such as factories and warehouses. Spill kits provide peace of mind knowing that you are prepared for any spills that may happen in your facility and that you can safely respond to them.

8) Controlling the hazards – Disposal

Chemicals should be disposed of according to the requirements stipulated in the Safety Data Sheet. Chemicals should never be allowed to enter a water course or storm water drain. Many chemicals are considered hazardous materials and must be disposed of correctly. Most local councils have programs for the disposal of toxic types of waste that should never be placed in “General Waste”. Refer your local council for more information.

Chemicals will continue to be a risk for all heritage groups, by applying the risk mitigation strategies detailed above you can demonstratively show you have managed the risk and prevent harm to volunteers, customers, and visitors.

If you have more questions or queries, contact:

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