

POTENTIAL EXPOSURE TO FORMALDEHYDE WHILST USING KERATIN TREATMENTS – HAIRDRESSERS AND BEAUTY SALON OPERATORS AND WORKERS BE AWARE

BACKGROUND

Recently SafeWork NSW has become aware of workers potentially being exposed to Formaldehyde, released whilst using imported products utilised in 'Keratin' (hair straightening) treatments.

Workers may be exposed to Formaldehyde during the entire hair straightening process especially when heat is applied (eg blow drying, flat ironing).

One workplace inspected was using a product containing formaldehyde, labelled in Arabic that stated its use was as a fabric softener.

Some of these products may contain formaldehyde but not indicate on the label an accurate level of their formaldehyde releasing potential during the hair treatment process.

The purpose of this safety alert is to remind persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) importing and/or supplying NSW workplaces of their responsibilities to provide accurate information both of the ingredients in their products when used as cosmetics and for the safe use of their products for workers during product dispensing and application.

This safety alert is also intended for PCBU's and workers to highlight the risks associated with the use of these products in the workplace and the control of those risks identified

WHAT IS FORMALDEHYDE?

Formaldehyde is a colourless strong smelling gas that is classified as a Class 2 Carcinogen causing cancer by inhalation as defined in the Hazardous Substance Information System (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au). It is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the World Health Organisation. The full harmonised classification for formaldehyde, as specified by the European Union using GHS criteria, is seen below.

FORMALDEHYDE

Toxic if inhaled, in contact with skin and if swallowed, causes severe skin burns and eye damage, Carcinogen. Category 2 suspected of causing cancer. May cause an allergic skin reaction.

The standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons permits free formaldehyde¹ to be used as a preservative ingredient in cosmetic hair products at concentrations of up to 0.05 per cent. When a cosmetic product is labelled with the warning statement 'CONTAINS FORMALDEHYDE' it may contain free formaldehyde up to 0.2 per cent.

Formaldehyde or substances that can release Formaldehyde may also be listed on the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) or product labels as 'Formalin, methylene glycol, methylene oxide, paraform, formic aldehyde, methanal, oxomethane, oxymethylene and morbidic acid.

ACTION REQUIRED

Work health and safety laws require that PCBUs that import/supply substances must ensure the carrying out of any calculations, analysis, testing or examination that may be necessary to ensure that a substance is without risks to health and safety.

¹ The term 'free formaldehyde' refers to the total amount of formaldehyde that is present in a cosmetic solution or available for release from a cosmetic solution.

Work health and safety laws require PCBUs to obtain information in relation to substances used and eliminate identified risks or where this is not possible, to control those risks as far as reasonably practicable.

RISK CONTROLS - IMPORTERS

- Ensure that a current SDS is developed/obtained for all imported substances that is compliant with work health and safety legislation, ensure that testing/analysis is undertaken of the substance to the requisite Australian legislation and standards to identify if it is a hazardous chemical and the risks associated with its use.
- Ensure that all hazardous chemicals imported are labelled in English including but not limited to the product identifier, Australian manufacturer/Importer, hazard or precautionary statements and hazardous pictogram as per Schedule 9, Part 3 Correct labelling of the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011.
- Ensure that at the time of initial supply to workplaces, that the SDS and other relevant product information is supplied.

RISK CONTROLS - PCBUS

- Where possible, eliminate the risk by using a substance that is Formaldehyde free.
- Ensure that information such as the SDS is obtained at the time of initial supply from the supplier.
- Ensure that the SDS is freely available to workers.
- Ensure that the substance is labelled in English identifying the risks associated with its use.
- Always follow instructions for safe use and handling found in the SDS and on the chemical container's label.
- Provide information, instruction, training and supervision to workers on the safe use of hazardous chemicals in the workplace.
- Always store chemicals in their original container and if the chemical is poured into another container (such as a spray bottle) make sure that container is compatible with the chemical and that it also is clearly labelled.
- Do not use food containers to hold hazardous chemicals.

RISK CONTROLS - WORKERS AND OTHERS

- Request a copy of the SDS.
- Ensure that you understand the SDS.
- Ensure that you are provided information and training in relation to the risks associated with using the hazardous chemical and the controls implemented by the PCBU.
- Inform the PCBU of any health effects suffered when using or exposed to the hazardous chemical.
- Follow instruction in relation to how to use the hazardous chemical safely.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Call SafeWork NSW on 13 10 50 or visit www.safework.nsw.gov.au where you can find codes of practice on:

- *Labelling of workplace hazardous chemicals* (catalogue no. SW08161)
- *Preparation of safety data sheets for hazardous chemicals* (catalogue no. WC03564)
- *Managing the risks of hazardous chemicals in the workplace* (catalogue no. SW08838).

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Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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SafeWork NSW, 92-100 Donnison Street,
Gosford, NSW 2250
Locked Bag 2906, Lisarow, NSW 2252
Customer Experience 13 10 50
Website www.safework.nsw.gov.au
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