

Organic Solvents

Hazard Awareness Bulletin
December 2022

Helping to reduce your exposure to Organic Solvents during metal production and fabrication.

What are Organic Solvents?

Organic solvents are carbon-based substances capable of dissolving or dispersing one or more other substances. Many classes of chemicals are used as organic solvents, including aliphatic hydrocarbons, aromatic hydrocarbons, amines, esters, ethers, ketones, and nitrated or chlorinated hydrocarbons.

Organic solvents are used in in paints, varnishes, lacquers, adhesives, glues, and in degreasing and cleaning agents, and in the production of dyes, polymers, plastics, textiles, printing inks, agricultural products, and pharmaceuticals.

Industrial organic solvents may be known by a variety of different names and commercial trade names and are often mixtures of several individual chemicals.

Examples of Common Organic Solvents

- acetone
- dichloromethane
- toluene
- methyl ethyl ketone
- 1-butanol
- petroleum spirits
- white spirit
- trichloroethylene
- xylene

How can Organic Solvents affect me?

Workplace exposures to organic solvents have been associated with a range of potential health effects – some can result from short-term acute exposures, others from long-term, repetitive, chronic exposures.

Did you know?

Certain organic solvents including carbon disulfide, n-hexane, toluene, p-xylene, ethylbenzene, n-propyl benzene, styrene, and trichloroethylene have been classified as ototoxins. Research has shown that exposure to ototoxins may cause hearing loss. Exposure to elevated noise levels may increase risk of hearing loss.

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2018-124/pdfs/2018-124.pdf>

Potential acute health effects of organic solvents from metal production or fabrication*

- Irritation of eyes, skin, nose, and throat
- Wheezing, chest tightness, breathlessness, and coughing
- Nervous system effects including central nervous system depression

Potential chronic health effects of organic solvents from metal production or fabrication*

- Nervous system effects including peripheral neuropathy
- Dermatitis and defatting of the skin
- Liver and kidney disorders
- Other systemic effects including cancer and reproductive disorders

*Chemical dependent

When do workplace exposures occur?

Inhalation

One of the main sources of worker exposure is from the inhalation of organic solvent vapors, particularly when spray applying solvent-based paints, coatings, foams and adhesives compounds. Other sources of exposure include surface cleaning/degreasing using solvents, handling, mixing and preparation of paints and the associated maintenance and cleaning of spray equipment after use.

The fine aerosol mists and vapors generated by spraying can be readily inhaled and organic solvents and other components they contain can be readily absorbed in your lungs.

Dermal

Direct organic solvent contact with the skin can cause irritation and defatting of the skin leading to dermatitis and other skin disorders. In addition, some organic solvents may be absorbed through the skin which can lead to a number of systemic effects.

Industries / Applications where workplace exposures may occur

Examples of metal production and fabrication applications, as well as other industries and processes in which individuals may be exposed to organic solvents include:

Metal production, metal fabrication and related applications

- Painting of parts and equipment
- Cleaning and degreasing
- Paint stripping/removal

Other applications

- Petroleum, oil, gas, and chemical industries
- Furniture manufacturing
- Construction

What can I do to help protect my workers?

Use appropriate controls

Employers need to conduct a risk assessment, including a determination of exposure levels compared to exposure limits to understand what control measures may be needed.

If required, controls from the hierarchy of controls should be implemented and their effectiveness measured. For example, local exhaust ventilation (LEV) can be a highly effective engineering control used in welding, grinding, and many other applications.

Get the equipment that you need

In addition to implementing other control measures, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) is commonly used to reduce exposures to workers.

Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) – air-purifying respirators

3M has a range of RPE that can help reduce your exposure to dusts, mists, metal fume, as well as gases and vapors commonly encountered in metal production and fabrication. These include disposable particulate respirators, reusable half- and full-facepiece respirators, all the way to heavy-duty battery powered air-purifying respirators combined with a range of robust facepieces, headtops, and helmets.

Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) – supplied air respirators

3M also has a wide range of supplied air respirators, suitable for use in some of the most demanding work environments.

Other PPE

3M can also provide a wide range of other health and safety solutions including:

- Head, eye, and face protection
- Disposable and reusable ear plugs and ear muffs
- Protective communication solutions
- Disposable protective coveralls
- Fall protection
- Confined space solutions



[Find your respirator](#)

Use our interactive disposable respirator selector to help you find a respirator that meets your protection needs.



[Find your respirator](#)

Use our respirator selection guide to help you find a respirator that meets your protection needs.



[Find your respirator](#)

Use our interactive powered & supplied air respirator selector to help you find a respirator that meets your protection needs.

[View all 3M PPE Solutions](#)

Training

A key component of an effective PPE program is training for both workers and those responsible for health and safety in the workplace.

For example, workers wearing PPE should be trained in and understand:

- How PPE works, what it does, and its limitations
- Inspection, maintenance, and cleaning of the PPE as well as identifying defective PPE and knowing proper disposal
- Proper fitting and use of the PPE
- The nature of all hazardous substances present and the potential effects upon their health

Stay Informed

When selecting the appropriate protective equipment, local, state, provincial, or national regulations, laws, and guidelines need to be followed.

One of the tasks of the occupational safety and health specialist is to monitor constantly changing legal regulations, occupational exposure limits, etc.

Technical Help

At any time, you can get in touch with one of our PPE professionals for personalized help on the selection and use of 3M products. They can help you through the process of selecting suitable products based on your risk assessment, as well as helping you understand how to fit, use, and maintain your PPE – helping you to stay protected.

References and Resources

NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topics – Organic Solvents. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/organsolv/>

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ILO - Chemical Safety Training Modules, Solvents. <https://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/protection/safework/cis/products/safetytm/solvents.htm>

Safety and Health Information Bulletin - Preventing Hearing Loss Caused by Chemical (Ototoxicity) and Noise Exposure. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2018-124. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2018-124/pdfs/2018-124.pdf>

All statements, technical information and recommendations are based on assessments 3M believes to be reliable as at the date of hereof, but the accuracy or completeness thereof is not guaranteed. Users must ensure suitability for your intended use of PPE based on workplace risk assessment, law and regulation. Other than for fraudulent misrepresentation, 3M expressly disclaims any and all liability arising from any use of the product or reliance on such information.



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