

## A brief Summary to COSHH Regulations:

What *is* a substance hazardous to health under COSHH?

Under COSHH there are a range of substances regarded as hazardous to health:

- Substances or mixtures of substances classified as dangerous to health under the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2002 (CHIP). These can be identified by their warning label and the supplier must provide a safety data sheet for them. Many commonly used dangerous substances are listed in the HSE publication *Approved Supply List. Information approved for the classification and labelling of substances and preparations dangerous for supply*, as part of the CHIP package. Suppliers must decide if substances and preparations that are not in the *Approved Supply List* are dangerous, and if so, label them accordingly.
- Substances with workplace exposure limits are listed in the HSE publication *EH40/2005 Workplace exposure limits*.
- Biological agents (bacteria and other micro-organisms), if they are directly connected with the work, such as with farming, sewage treatment, or healthcare, or if the exposure is incidental to the work (e.g. exposure to bacteria from an air-conditioning system that is not properly maintained).
- Any kind of dust if its average concentration in the air exceeds the levels specified in COSHH.
- Any other substance which creates a risk to health, but which for technical reasons may not be specifically covered by CHIP including: asphyxiates (i.e. gases such as argon and helium, which, while not dangerous in themselves, can endanger life by reducing the amount of oxygen available to breathe), pesticides, medicines, cosmetics or substances produced in chemical processes.

What is *not* a substance hazardous to health under COSHH?

COSHH applies to virtually all substances hazardous to health except:

- asbestos and lead, which have their own regulations;
- substances which are hazardous only because they are:
  - radioactive;
  - at high pressure;
  - at extreme temperatures; or
  - have explosive or flammable properties (other regulations apply to these risks);
- biological agents that are outside the employer's control, e.g. catching an infection from a workmate. (If in doubt, please contact HSE for advice.)

For the vast majority of commercial chemicals, the presence (or not) of a warning label will indicate whether COSHH is relevant. For example, there is no warning label on ordinary household washing-up liquid, so if it's used at work you do not have to worry about COSHH; but there is a warning label on bleach, and so COSHH does apply to its use in the workplace.