

WL15

COSHH essentials for welding, hot work and allied processes



This information will help employers (including the self-employed) comply with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

Regulations 2002 (COSHH), as amended, to control exposure and protect workers' health.

It is also useful for trade union safety representatives.

Cutting fume is associated with an increased risk of lung disease and asthma.

This sheet describes good practice using engineering control - fume extraction or a water table.

It covers the points you need to follow to reduce exposure to an adequate level.

It is important to follow all the points, or use equally effective measures.

The advice does not apply to hand-held plasma cutting equipment.

Main points

- Dust and fume can cause serious lung diseases.
- Keep exposure as low as possible using all the controls in this sheet.
- Design, install, commission and maintain engineering controls. See sheet G406.
- Health monitoring is usually needed. See sheet G401.

Arc-plasma cutting: Fixed equipment

Control approach 2 Engineering control

Access and premises

- ✓ Only allow access to authorised staff.
- ✓ Locate the work away from doors, windows and walkways. Stop draughts interfering with the extraction.

Equipment

- ✓ Can you locate mechanised plasma cutting equipment in a self-contained extracted booth?
- ✓ Can you use argon-hydrogen as the plasma gas? This creates less fume.
- ✓ Provide a good standard of general ventilation; 5-10 air changes per hour, with a through draught.
- ✓ Use a water table to suppress fume, or a downdraught table to capture fume from plasma cutting.
- ✓ You need an air speed of at least 2 metres per second into a downdraught table.
- ✓ Fit a manometer, pressure gauge or tell-tale to show that the extraction is working.
- ✓ Discharge cleaned, extracted air to a safe place outside the building, away from doors and windows.
- ✓ Have a supply of clean air coming into the workroom to replace extracted air.

Procedures

- ✓ Remove grease and all surface coatings first, unless they are meant to be welded or cut through.
- ✓ Arrange work so that the worker's head is out of the fume.
- ✓ Confirm that extraction is turned on and working.
- ✓ Use the plasma torch at the lowest power that achieves an acceptable cut.
- ✓ Check for gas leaks.

Caution: aluminium drosses can produce hydrogen.

Maintenance, examination and testing

- ✓ Follow the instructions in the manual - keep equipment in effective and efficient working order.
- ✓ If any equipment is faulty, repair it straight away.
- ✓ Use biocides and corrosion inhibitors in water baths. Remove dross, and change the water regularly.

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- ✓ Daily, look for signs of damage.
 - ✓ At least once a week, check that the extraction system and gauges work properly.
 - ✓ You need to know the manufacturer's specifications to check the extraction's performance.
 - ✓ If this information isn't available, hire a competent ventilation engineer to determine the performance needed for effective control.
 - ✓ The engineer's report must show the target extraction rates.
 - ✓ Keep this information in your testing log-book.
 - ✓ Get a competent ventilation engineer to examine the extraction thoroughly and test its performance at least once every 14 months, or six months for non-ferrous metals. See the HSE publication HSG54 - see 'Further information'.
 - ✓ Test any RPE at least once every three months.
 - ✓ Keep records of all examinations and tests for at least five years.
 - ✓ Review records - failure patterns show where preventive maintenance is needed.

Water

- ✓ Weekly, test suppression water to ensure that treatments are working properly. Get advice from a water treatment company.
- ✓ Keep records of tests.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- ✓ Ask your safety equipment supplier to help you get the right PPE.
- ✓ Provide storage for clean and contaminated PPE.

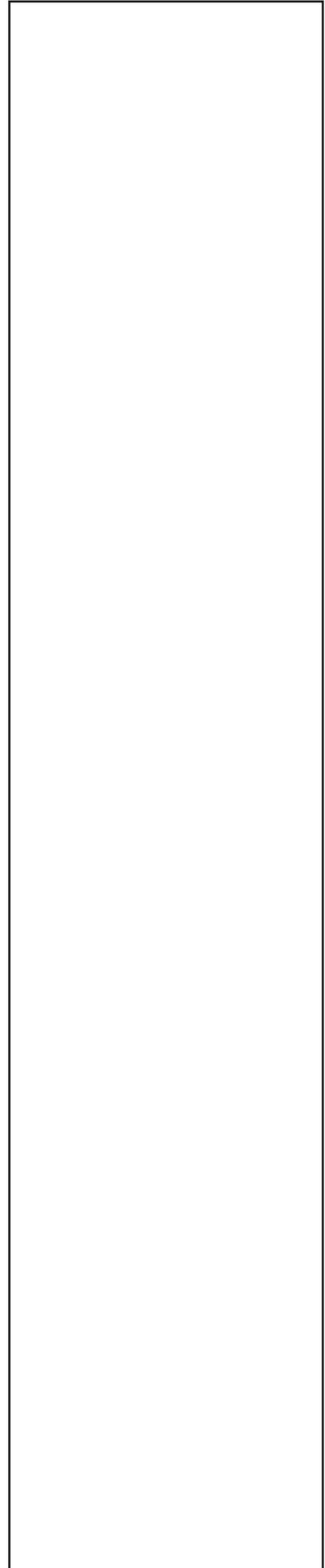
Respiratory protective equipment (RPE)

- ✓ RPE may be needed, even if the water bath or extraction is working properly. See sheet G409 on air sampling to help you decide.
- ✓ If necessary, use a type LDH2 air-line helmet to BS EN 1835 standard or type TH2 powered filtering helmet to BS EN146/EN12942. See sheet R3.
- ✓ For short-term tasks, type P3 high-efficiency disposable RPE is acceptable.
- ✓ Make sure that workers check their RPE works properly before use.
- ✓ Replace RPE filters as recommended by your supplier. Throw away disposable masks after one use.
- ✓ Keep RPE clean and store it away from dust.

Other protective equipment

- ✓ Provide and ensure that workers use a welding helmet, flame-resistant overalls and protective gloves.
- ✓ Use a properly equipped contract laundry or a suitable equivalent to wash work clothing.
- ✓ Skin creams help in washing contamination from the skin. After-work creams help to replace skin oils.

Caution: Never allow use of compressed air for removing dust from clothing.



Health monitoring

- ✓ You should consider health monitoring. See sheet G401.
- ✓ Consult an occupational health professional - see 'Useful links'.

Cleaning and housekeeping

- ✓ Keep the work area clean and free of combustible materials.
- ✓ Clean the general workroom once a week.
- ✓ Dispose of hazardous wastes safely.

Training and supervision

- ✓ Tell workers that fume from welding and cutting can cause serious lung diseases.
- ✓ Working in the right way and using the controls correctly is important for exposure control. Train and supervise workers. See sheet WLO.

Further information

- *Maintenance, examination and testing of local exhaust ventilation* HSG54 (Second edition) HSE Books 1998 ISBN 0 7176 1485 9
- *Respiratory protective equipment at work: A practical guide* HSG53 (Third edition) HSE Books 2005 ISBN 0 7176 2904 X
- For environmental guidelines see sheet WLO

Useful links

- Your trade association may advise on health and safety consultants and training providers.
- For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk/. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.
- Contact the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) on 01332 298101 or at www.bohs.org for lists of qualified hygienists who can help you.
- Look in the Yellow Pages under 'Health and safety consultants' and 'Health authorities and services' for 'occupational health'.
- Also see www.nhsplus.nhs.uk.

This document is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/ and www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/essentials/

This document contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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Employee checklist

- Do you know how to use the controls properly?
- Is the extraction or water suppression working?
- Check that any RPE works properly every time you use it.
- Use, maintain and store your protective equipment in accordance with instructions.
- Look for signs of leaks, wear and damage.
- If you find any problems, tell your supervisor. Don't just carry on working.
- Co-operate with health monitoring.
- Wash your hands before eating, drinking, or using the lavatory.
- Never clean your hands with solvents or concentrated cleaning products.
- Use skin creams provided as instructed.