TOOLBOXTALK

9 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT DECK COATINGS & SEALANTS



Most waterproofers probably cannot explain every health hazard associated with the chemicals they use. Polyurethane coatings, primers, and sealants are a good example. Some contain **isocyanates**, chemicals that can cause sensitization and serious respiratory reactions. A sensitizer can cause your body to become unusually sensitive to a chemical, so future exposures may trigger big reactions that did not happen before. Chemical names alone do not tell you what they can do to your body, and SDSs can require significant scientific knowledge to fully understand.

IF YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE SDS OR LABEL, ASK SOMEONE WHO DOES. THERE IS NO SHAME IN ASKING WHETHER A MATERIAL CAN PUT YOU IN THE HOSPITAL.

IF SOMEONE HAS A REACTION

If someone thinks they are experiencing a reaction, stop the exposure and get the worker away from the material. Follow the SDS first aid instructions and report the reaction. ***Severe or worsening difficulty breathing, severe wheezing, collapse, or other signs of a serious reaction require immediate medical attention. Call 911.***

1. **You can become allergic or sensitized to a product you have used for years.**

Previous use without a reaction does not mean future use is safe. Once sensitized, a much smaller exposure may cause a much more serious reaction.

2. **Isocyanate reactions can cause severe asthma attacks and death.**

Coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, and difficulty breathing can progress into a medical emergency. Isocyanate related occupational asthma has resulted in worker deaths.

3. **You could leave work feeling fine and become sick hours later.**

Some reactions are immediate. Others can be delayed for several hours, so symptoms later in the day may still be related to the coating work.

4. **Do not overlook the primer.**

Primer, base coat, wear coat, topcoat, sealants, and cleaners can have completely different chemical hazards. **Every product has its own SDS and specific required protection.**

5. **Getting it on your skin can help sensitize you.**

Exposure is not just about what you breathe. Contaminated hands, gloves, sleeves, tools, rollers, and rags can create repeated skin exposure.

6. **"We are outside" does not mean "we are safe."**

Wind can dilute airborne chemicals, but it cannot guarantee clean air around workers mixing and applying large quantities of material. A sensitized worker may react to an exposure that does not bother anyone else.

7. The wrong respirator cartridge can leave you unprotected.

Particulate filters and organic vapor cartridges do different jobs. Depending on the exposure, combination protection may be needed. Never guess based on what cartridge happens to be available. Always read the SDS and respirator label.

8. A reaction that goes away when you leave work is still a reaction.

Recurring rash, irritation, coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, or breathing problems around certain materials should not become accepted as "part of the job." ***Always report recurring symptoms.***

9. "I have used this stuff for years" is not proof that it is safe for you.

With sensitizers, years of previous exposure can be part of how the problem develops. Know what you are using, understand the protection required, and ask questions before exposure rather than after a reaction.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why can a product become dangerous to someone who has used it for years?

   a) Sensitization from repeated exposure

2. Why does working outside not guarantee protection?

   a) Outdoor air does not guarantee safety

3. Why are particulate filters and organic vapor cartridges not interchangeable?

   a) Different contaminants

4. What should you do if you do not understand the SDS or label?

   a) Ask someone who understands it

References: OSHA Isocyanates and Hazard Communication guidance; NIOSH Isocyanates; NIOSH *Preventing Asthma and Death from Diisocyanate Exposure.*

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