

THE BAD STUFF - Facts About Fiberglass

Fiberglass

Direct contact with fiberglass materials or exposure to airborne fiberglass dust may irritate the skin, eyes, nose and throat. There is a possibility that these fibers cause permanent damage to the lungs or airways, or increase the likelihood of developing lung cancer. Inhaling the fibers may irritate the airways, resulting in cough and production of excess mucus, a condition known as bronchitis.

Epoxy Resins

Epoxy Resins are chemicals used in lacquers, varnishes and plastics, or in combination with other components to form plastics. They are also used to strengthen, harden, or give flexibility to fiberglass. Breathing epoxy resins may cause chest tightness, shortness of breath or wheezing. Skin contact can cause rash.

Styrene

Styrene is part of the polyester resin used with fiberglass. It is extremely irritating to the eyes and nose at low concentrations; at higher concentrations it causes headache, dizziness, and sometimes nausea.

Acetone and MEK (Methyl Ethyl Ketone) Acetone and MEK are commonly used solvents in fiberglass lay-up and spray-up. They are irritating to the eyes, nose and throat. Inhaling the vapors may cause drowsiness, breathing difficulties, and more serious damage to the lungs and nervous system.

Protective Clothing and Equipment Gloves and other protective clothing can help prevent skin problems by reducing direct contact with glass fibers. Dust masks can help prevent or reduce the inhalation of small fiberglass particles. Goggles that fit properly can prevent eye irritation. Respirators, if properly selected, used and maintained, reduce the exposure to dusts, fibers and chemicals. Respirator selection is based on the size and concentration of the fiberglass particles. Information on effective protective equipment is available from the state and federal Occupational Safety and Health Agencies, the National Safety Council, and the American Conference of Government Industrial Hygienists' Industrial Ventilation Manual.

Work Practices and Personal Habits Wash hands before eating and keep food away from the worksite. Eating, drinking and gum chewing at the worksite should be avoided. When using chemicals with fiberglass, always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for reducing exposure. Be alert for possible breathing effects related to your workplace. Look out for chest tightness, wheezing, severe coughing or coughing that does not stop. If these conditions appear, see a doctor. Smoking cigarettes and/or marijuana may increase the risk of developing lung disease when combined with exposure to fiberglass and to chemicals used with it.