

Toolbox

Safety Series



DERMATITIS

Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin from any cause. One out of every four workers is exposed to some form of skin irritant. Irritation may vary from slight reddening with mild itching to a rash with intense itching. In severe cases, there may be open sores, with or without swelling.

If you think you have dermatitis, report it to your supervisor immediately. Look for exposure to a recognized skin irritant or sensitizer. If one is found, clean it up to prevent a recurrence.

There are four mechanisms that can cause industrial dermatitis:

1. Primary irritants
2. Allergic sensitizers
3. Photosensitizers
4. Mechanical trauma

A primary irritant is one that will cause damage or dermatitis on contact to anyone's skin if sufficient time is allowed. Mineral acids or alkali are primary irritants.

Allergic sensitizers do not affect everyone's skin, only those who have developed an allergy to the particular chemical. Examples are poison ivy and epoxy resin hardeners.

Photosensitizers are chemicals that only affect the skin in the presence of light - usually ultraviolet light.

A typical mechanical cause of dermatitis is glass fiber. The particles stick in the skin, causing an irresistible itch.

Frequent washing is a successful preventive measure. The use of large quantities of water on the skin following exposure to irritants is necessary. The type of soap used may also cause increased irritation.

Investigations of occupational skin disease should focus on the following items: degree of perspiration, personal cleanliness habits, pre-existence of skin disorders and allergic states, diet, and health.

The best way of controlling dermatitis is to prevent skin contact with irritants. Wear protective equipment or clothing that is properly designed, worn, and maintained. It will provide a reasonable barrier against most skin irritants.

Toolbox

Safety Series



DERMATITIS

LEADER NOTES

Objective: To explain the causes of dermatitis and how to protect against exposure.

Potential Injuries: Dermatitis of the skin.

THE TALK – POINTS TO COVER

- Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin from any cause.

- Irritation may vary from slight reddening with mild itching, to a rash with intense itching.

- There are four mechanisms that can cause industrial dermatitis:
 1. Primary irritants
A primary irritant is one that will cause damage or dermatitis on contact of anyone's skin if sufficient time is allowed.
 2. Allergic sensitizers
Allergic sensitizers do not affect everyone's skin, only those who have developed an allergy to the particular chemical.
 3. Photosensitizers
Photosensitizers are chemicals that only affect the skin in the presence of light - usually ultraviolet light.
 4. Mechanical trauma
A typical mechanical cause of dermatitis is glass fiber. The particles stick in the skin, causing an irresistible itch.

- Frequent washing is a successful preventive measure.

- The use of large quantities of water on the skin following exposure to irritants is necessary.

- The type of soap used may cause additional irritation.

- The best way of controlling dermatitis is to prevent skin contact with irritants. Wear protective equipment or clothing.

