

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

COSHH stands for **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health**. This regulation governs the storage and use of substances such as chemicals that may be hazardous to health. Its purpose is to prevent or control exposure to substances to prevent ill health.

Carrying out a COSHH Assessment

In the same way as completing a risk assessment, the purpose of a COSHH assessment is to think about:

- What do you do that may involve hazardous substances?
- How could they cause harm?
- How can you reduce the risk of harm?

The most likely example of hazardous substances in the sporting environment is cleaning chemicals and the cleaning process.

Cleanliness is part of your health and safety requirements, but it may involve using chemicals that if spilt on a person or swallowed by a person, could cause injury or harm, i.e. burns or poisoning. In the same way, if your physical activity or sport generates dust (i.e. gymnastics uses chalk for safety on equipment), you need to manage the cleaning of that to prevent the inhalation of dust.

The best way to control this risk is to carry out an assessment:

- Can you avoid using a hazardous substance and replace it with a less harmful substitute? For example could you replace a solvent-based cleaning product with a water-based one?
- Can you use a safer form of the substance? E.g. is there a solid form rather than a liquid form, removing the risk of spillage?
- Can you change the process to a safer alternative? E.g. using a vacuum cleaner to clean up dust rather than sweeping it up with a brush?

A great starting point is to walk around your space and think about where hazardous substances may be used:

- Do you have toilets or changing facilities that may have bleach-based products?
- Do you use floor cleaners (including things like mops) that have chemicals to remove grease and dust?

Chemical Safety Data Sheets

Where you do use a substance that could be hazardous to health, you should ensure you get and retain a Chemical Safety Data Sheet – this should be available from the manufacturer and will provide information on the chemicals themselves, as well as the safe use and storage and details of what to do in an emergency.

Control measures

Where it isn't possible to remove the hazard by replacing it with a different, safer product, adequate controls need to be put in place to minimise the risk of exposure. Control measures may include things like:

Controlling Procedures	<p>If cleaning is a necessary part of your health and safety plan, can this be carried out at a time when there are no participants or visitors present?</p> <p>If it can't be managed in that way, can the area that is being cleaned be sectioned off to prevent anyone from entering during the cleaning process?</p>
Controlling Processes	<p>If the hazardous substance is unavoidable, the use of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) will help to control the risk. PPE are protective items such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face masks to prevent the inhalation of chemical or dust fumes. • Protective gloves to prevent contact with skin. • Protective clothing to prevent the risk of spillage on clothing. • Protective eyewear to prevent the risk of chemicals or fumes getting into your eyes.
Controlling Access	<p>Any hazardous substance should be securely stored in a way that it cannot be accidentally accessed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous products should be kept ideally in a locked space, or if not available, certainly out of reach of children, e.g. bleach products that may be necessary for the cleaning of a toilet or changing facilities should not be kept in that space. • Chemical safety data sheets should be kept with the products for reference in the event of an accident. • After the substance has been used, equipment used with those substances should be stored away, e.g. cleaning rags with chemicals should be disposed of in a bin with a lid rather than in an open bin where someone may come into contact with it.

In the same way as your risk assessments need to be regularly reviewed, your COSHH assessments also need to be reviewed regularly and updated when a new substance is used or an existing substance is changed or replaced.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides practical advice and guidance about COSHH on their website.