

Hair Smoothing Products that May Contain or Release Formaldehyde

Cal/OSHA has recently received a number of inquiries concerning the safe use in hair salons of certain hair smoothing products which may contain or release formaldehyde. Other state and federal agencies are also investigating reports regarding the use of these products including any hazards to contractors, customers or other members of the public. Workplace exposures to formaldehyde are required to be limited because formaldehyde is a recognized carcinogen and because exposure to formaldehyde can cause irritation or allergic reaction of the skin or respiratory system, shortness of breath, and irritation of the eyes.

What is Cal/OSHA doing?

Cal/OSHA is evaluating whether these products meet California and Federal OSHA's labeling and other right-to-know requirements regarding formaldehyde content. Cal/OSHA is also investigating complaints regarding the exposures of employees who handle, apply, or in other ways are exposed to these products. During these investigations air monitoring may be conducted to determine whether employees are exposed to air concentrations of formaldehyde and other chemicals that exceed Cal/OSHA's permissible exposure limits. Information from these investigations will be available once each investigation is closed.

What are the employee protection requirements for formaldehyde?

Employees in every state are covered by the Federal OSHA regulation for formaldehyde adopted in 1992, or by an equivalent regulation in states such as California which have an OSHA approved workplace safety program. The OSHA formaldehyde regulation is summarized in a 2-page Fact Sheet which can be viewed at:

http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/formaldehyde-factsheet.pdf. The California regulation can be viewed at: <http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5217.html>

Employers with workers who may be exposed to formaldehyde either as hair stylists, or as other salon workers such as receptionists, hair washers, etc., should review the OSHA Fact Sheet above, and the California regulation on formaldehyde, to gain an understanding of what may be required in their workplace if they do hair smoothing treatments with materials that contain or can release formaldehyde.

The regulation contains requirements likely to be applicable to all workplaces performing treatments with hair smoothing products that contain or can release formaldehyde. Those requirements include:

- Air monitoring to determine the concentration of formaldehyde to which employees are exposed.
- Control measures such as ventilation to maintain exposures below regulatory limits.
- Use of gloves and other personal protective equipment.
- Worker training on the health effects of formaldehyde and the employer's control procedures.
- Emergency eyewash and shower equipment if employees may be exposed to splashes of solutions containing formaldehyde above the levels specified in the standard.
- Medical surveillance for workers who:
 - Are exposed above the action level or short term exposure limit.
 - Develop signs and symptoms of exposure to formaldehyde.
 - Are exposed in emergencies such as a spill of a large quantity of formaldehyde.
- Notification to Cal/OSHA if employees are exposed to formaldehyde above regulatory limits.

The Cal/OSHA Hazard Communication regulation requires that employees be trained about all potentially hazardous chemicals in the workplace. The standard can be found at: <http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5194.html>

For additional information on the Cal/OSHA requirements for formaldehyde, chemical hazard communication, and other workplace safety and health topics, you can contact the Cal/OSHA Consultation Service at (800) 963-9424. This website will be updated as additional information becomes available.

Other Agencies that have information on hair smoothing products:

Oregon OSHA has extensive information available within this announcement:

http://www.orosha.org/admin/newsrelease/2010/nr2010_28.pdf

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, FDA, statement:

<http://www.fda.gov/Cosmetics/ProductandIngredientSafety/ProductInformation/ucm228898.htm>

Where can I learn more?

The California Safe Cosmetics Program also has information on chemicals and cosmetics safety:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cosmetics>

The California Department of Public Health's Hazard Evaluation System Information Service (HESIS) has a Fact Sheet with information about the hazards of formaldehyde, how to limit exposure and complying with the Cal/OSHA regulation: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/hesis/Documents/formaldehyde.pdf>

The Cal/OSHA regulation for formaldehyde, Title 8, California Code of Regulations, General Industry Safety Orders Section 5217, can be accessed at <http://www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5217.html>.

Cal/OSHA's Guide to the California Hazard Communication Standard can be found at:

http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/hazcom.pdf

Federal Agencies that have relevant information:

Federal OSHA has an extensive page of information on formaldehyde and the formaldehyde regulation at:

<http://63.234.227.130/SLTC/formaldehyde/index.html>

Federal OSHA has a chemical database that can be used to find information on formaldehyde and other chemical hazards: <http://www.osha.gov/web/dep/chemicaldata/default.asp>

NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, also has extensive information about formaldehyde at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/formaldehyde/>

Health Canada has posted information at:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/2010/2010_167-eng.php

Information on filing an employee complaint with Cal/OSHA can be found at:

<http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/EnforcementPage.htm>