

Working Safely with Metalworking Fluids: Reducing the Risk of Dermatitis

Dermatitis cases caused by metal working fluids (MWF) are largely preventable. The key to controlling dermatitis is cleanliness and minimizing contact with metalworking fluids. Both personal hygiene and environmental *cleanliness* (that is, good housekeeping) are essential. The following control measures are suggested to help minimize the risk and or extent of MWF induced dermatitis.

- Avoid all unnecessary contact with metal working fluids by using splash guards and protective clothing where feasible.
- Require workers to wear clean clothing each day. Never allow oil-soaked rags to be carried in pockets or over the shoulder.
- Use short sleeved, rather than long sleeved, garments. Friction on the skin from oil-soaked cuffs often promotes problems.
- Provide and encourage employees to use barrier creams before starting work and after each time they wash their hands. Different barrier creams are needed to protect against different types of oils, so ensure that the correct one is used.
- Provide washing facilities. Avoid the use of strong soaps and abrasive cleaners. Do not allow solvents to be used for cleaning the skin.
- Provide and encourage employees to use reconditioning creams at the end of each shift. These products help replace natural fats and oils which are removed by exposure to oils and washing.
- Require that all cuts and scratches receive prompt medical attention. Oil in wounds can cause secondary infections.
- Prevent contamination of oils, and minimize the use of biocides. Use the manufacturer's recommended dilution ratios for metalworking fluids. Establish a program for changing oils regularly, or as needed. Too many metal fines or too much organic matter in the oil can overwhelm the ability of a biocide to control growth.
- Control the concentration of coolant additives, as too much will contribute to an excessively irritating mix. Train operators to use additives correctly.
- Train workers on the dermal risk associated with working with metal working fluid, how to recognize dermal problems, the importance of reporting and early treatment of skin problems and how to comply with and the importance of following company prescribed MWF controls.

Monitoring and attention to these details by management, supervisors and workers can contribute to the reduction and elimination of dermatitis caused by metal working fluids.

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