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Guidance Series: RCM Activists - Health and Safety Reps

Entonox Safety in the workplace, administration equipment, Scavenging and ventilation systems, occupational exposure levels.

Entonox is a medical gas 50%Oxygen 50% Nitrous Oxide – used as a form of inhalation pain relief in many medical settings, in Obstetrics it is used in Labour.

Nitrous Oxide is classed as a hazardous substance, which if exposure to such substances is not properly controlled may cause ill health in a number of ways. (*HSE EH405/2005 Workplace exposure limits 2020 edition.*)

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/eh40.htm>

https://www.boconline.co.uk/wcsstore/UK_BOC_Industrial_Ntl_Store/pdf/downloads/Entonox-essential-guide.pdf

As elected RCM Health and Safety Representatives you can legally undertake an Inspection of your workplace. You will need to give reasonable notice to your employer (if it has not been inspected within last 3 months), however if an issue has arisen urgently, please discuss with the employer, that you intend to do this.

You can perform an inspection individually or take another RCM activist with you, your manager can accompany you if they wish to do so.

As part of the inspection of areas where Entonox is administered you should contact the Estates officer and HB/ Trust safety lead ask for written response and evidence to answer the following questions:

- ✚ What scavenging /ventilation system the unit has
- ✚ What are the rate of air changes per hour and how it works.
- ✚ Are these compliant with Manufactures recommendations and the DOH recommendations?
- ✚ How often are the seals checked on all tubing and appliances are these seals changed regularly – is this compliant with manufacturer and DOH recommendations?



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- ✚ When was the last inspection what was the outcome
- ✚ Evidence of maintenance and regular inspections for damage to equipment required to administer and work with Entonox safely.
- ✚ Do you have a clear policy for administration of Entonox
- ✚ What training do staff receive regarding the administration of Entonox including storage, transportation and personal safety.

There should be evidence that is happening.

Once you have completed your inspection you **must report** any issues arising.

The first thing you should do is submit an incident report and you should escalate this **immediately, verbally and in writing to** the employer, area manager and the **employer's safety officer** and ensure this is raised at the employer safety meetings, to make sure it is followed up.

It is always worth keeping an eye on it yourself and checking what progress is being made.

As an elected H&S rep for a recognised TU you should be part of the safety meetings and any consultations.

RCM H&S reps can work with the safety officer and, if necessary, a representative from the Estates department to perform a COSHH risk assessment.

Inform the staff side chair and work collectively with other Trade Unions with members in the affected areas.

Workplace Exposure Limit (WELs)

WELs are British occupational exposure limits and are set in order to help protect the health of workers. WELs are concentrations of hazardous substances in the air, averaged over a specified period of time, referred to as a time-weighted average (TWA). Two time periods are generally used:

Long-term(8hrs)

Short-term (15 mins)



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NB- Short term exposure limits (STELs) are set to help prevent effects such as eye irritation, which may occur following exposure of a few minutes. (*HSE EH405/2005 Workplace exposure limits 2020 edition.*)

WELs and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002(as amended) (COSHH)

Substances that have been assigned a WEL are subject to the requirements of COSHH- These regulations require employers to prevent or control exposure to hazardous substances. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/eh40.pdf>

For further information go to <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics.htm>

How to conduct a COSHH risk assessment

A COSHH assessment concentrates on the hazards and risks from hazardous substances in your workplace. (Remember that health hazards are not limited to substances labelled as 'hazardous')

Identify the hazards

- ✚ Identify which substances are harmful by reading the product labels and safety data sheets (SDS)
- ✚ If you are in doubt, escalate to your employers estates officer and /or safety office request they contact the supplier

Who might be harmed and how

- ✚ How might workers be exposed? Think about the route into the body (whether the substance can be breathed in, get onto or through the skin or can even be swallowed) and the effects of exposure by each of these routes
- ✚ Think of how often people work with the substance and for how long
- ✚ Think about anyone else who could be exposed.
- ✚ Do not forget maintenance workers, contractors and other visitors or members of the public who could be exposed - have discussions with staff side and other trade union reps
- ✚ Also think about people who could be exposed accidentally, e.g., while cleaning, or what happens if controls fail



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Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Once you have conducted a risk assessment and identified which harmful substances are present, and how workers can be harmed, you need to think about preventing exposure.

- ✚ Do you really need to use a particular substance, or is a safer alternative available?
- ✚ Can you change the process to eliminate its use or avoid producing it? If this is not possible, you **must** put in place adequate control measures to reduce exposure

The measures you adopt could include the following:

Changing the process to reduce risks

- ✚ Consider whether you can change the process you use to reduce the risk of exposure. For example, you could reduce the temperature of a process to reduce the amount of vapor getting into the air or use pellets instead of powders as they are less dusty

Containment

- ✚ Enclose the process or activity as much as possible to minimise the escape or release of the harmful substance
- ✚ Use closed transfer and handling systems and minimise handling of materials
- ✚ Extract emissions of the substance near the source

Systems of work

- ✚ Restrict access to those people who need to be there
- ✚ Plan the storage of materials and use appropriate containers. Check that storage containers are correctly labelled and that incompatible materials, for example acids and caustics, are separated
- ✚ Plan the storage and disposal of waste

Cleaning

- ✚ Exposure to hazardous substances can occur during cleaning, so plan and organise the workplace so that it can be easily and effectively cleaned
- ✚ Smooth work surfaces will allow easy cleaning



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- ✚ Have the right equipment and procedures to clear up spillages quickly and safely
- ✚ Clean regularly, using a 'dust-free' method – vacuum, do not sweep
- ✚ If you have five or more employees, you must record your assessment but, even if you have fewer than five, it makes sense to write down what steps you have taken to identify the risks. And the really important part is making a list of the actions you have taken to control the risks to workers' health.
- ✚ The risk assessment should be regularly reviewed to ensure that it is kept up to date to take into account any changes in your workplace

Legal responsibilities of employers

Health and safety law states that organisations must:

- ✚ assess risks to employees, customers, partners and any other people who could be affected by their activities.
- ✚ arrange for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of preventive and protective measures.
- ✚ have a written health and safety policy if they employ five or more people.
- ✚ ensure they have access to competent health and safety advice.
- ✚ consult employees about their risks at work and current preventive and protective measures.

Failure to comply with these requirements can have serious consequences – for both organisations and individuals. Sanctions include fines, imprisonment and disqualification.

H&S reps working in partnership with management and the employer will make sure that once a risk assessment has been undertaken it is acted upon, monitored and evaluated, to ensure safety in the working environment. This will enable H&S reps to escalate any concerns if the action and requirements are not put into place. If for any reason, someone feels it is not being taken seriously or escalated appropriately, they can always talk to the next level of management or, if they work in the NHS in England, a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

RIDDOR – Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 puts duties on employers, the self-employed and people in control of work premises (the Responsible Person) to report certain serious



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workplace accidents, occupational diseases and specified dangerous occurrences (near misses).

Incidents that happen in Northern Ireland should be reported to [HSE NI](#).

Members who believe they have symptoms caused by exposure to Entonox:

- + Inform manager and the area manager
 - + Inform workplace RCM Health and Safety representative or Steward.
 - + **Ring RCM Legal help line - Personal Injury 0330 173 6125**
 - + Complete a record of the symptoms and issues via the employer's personal accident reporting process – keep a record for themselves
 - + Escalate via employer's incident report process – keep a record for themselves
 - + The manager should refer member to occupational health
 - + If not, the member should be able to self-refer
(If this option not available then as members representative you can formally request that the manager and HR make a referral in a timely manner).
 - + Occupational health – should discuss options available for testing
 - + See personal GP ask for referral to other relevant health professionals – keep a diary of appointments and all correspondence.
- + **Ring RCM Regional Officer for any further advice via RCM Connect 03003030444**

Health and Safety Executive

The Health and Safety Executive is a UK government agency responsible for the encouragement, regulation and enforcement of workplace health, safety and welfare, and for research into occupational risks in Great Britain.

Contacting the HSE to report Health and Safety concerns:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/>

HSE Northern Ireland



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<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/>

HSE Scotland

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/scotland/>

Further Resources:

COSHH:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.htm>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/faq.htm#coshh-assessment>

WELs:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/eh40.htm>

ENTONOX:

<https://www.bochealthcare.co.uk/en/products-and-services/products-and-services-by-category/medical-gases/entonox/entonox.html>

https://www.boconline.co.uk/wcsstore/UK_BOC_Industrial_Ntl_Store/pdf/downloads/Entonox-essential-guide.pdf

Storage and handling

https://www.bochealthcare.co.uk/en/products-and-services/products-and-services-by-category/hospital-equipment/cylinders/handling_and_storage/handling_and_storage.html#:~:text=ENTONOX%C2%AE%20cylinders%20should%20be,to%20protect%20cylinders%20from%20theft.



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