



photo imaging council

## **Work with Photographic Chemicals - Pregnant and Breast Feeding Women**

Pregnancy should not be equated with ill-health but as a part of everyday life. Protection of health and safety in respect of pregnant women can, as the Health & Safety Executive state, be adequately addressed by applying existing health and safety management procedures in the relevant areas. Many women work whilst they are pregnant and may return to work whilst they are still breast-feeding. However, some hazards in the workplace may affect the health and safety of new and expectant mothers and conditions considered acceptable in work situations may no longer be so during pregnancy.

To identify potential hazards a risk assessment should be undertaken which should consider the likelihood of any potential hazard that may be present to cause harm. Although this document refers to potential risks from exposure to photochemicals it should be recognised that other risks exist such as repeated or heavy lifting, working at heights or in tight situations.

With specific reference to chemical agents and pregnancy or breast-feeding, those with the following risk phrases require appropriate controls to be in place to control risk.

- Limited evidence of a carcinogenic effect (R40)
- Possible risk of irreversible effects (R68)
- May cause cancer (R45)
- May cause heritable genetic damage (R46)
- May cause cancer by inhalation (R49)
- May cause harm to the unborn child (R61)
- Possible risk of harm to the unborn child (R63)
- May cause harm to breastfed babies (R64)

The figures in brackets refer to the European Union reference number for each phrase.

With regard to photographic chemicals it is unlikely that substances with these risk phrases will be used, but some chemicals with risk phrase R40 & R68 are used - an example is hydroquinone - the label on the chemical and the safety data sheet will indicate the hazards and risk phrases.

Any risk assessment needs to identify and assess the nature, degree and duration of potential exposure to assess the risk and put in place appropriate control measures.

Also because there is a period of 30 to 45 days when a woman will be unsure that she is pregnant and is unable to inform her employer - precautions have to be in place to reduce exposure of all women who may potentially be exposed to such

hazardous agents. Hence the introduction of simple rules for all employees to follow at all times should control exposure to photochemical hazards. These include the use of gloves, eye protection and protective clothing to keep chemicals off the skin, working in well-ventilated areas to avoid breathing dusts and vapours and not eating, drinking and smoking in areas where chemicals are used.

If powders are handled, the possibility of dust exposure during the pouring of powder needs to be considered and if the creation of dust cannot be avoided, adequate control of exposure such as that provided by a chemical hood or local extraction system should be used. If this is not possible then an appropriate dust mask or respirator should be supplied.

Control measures should focus on prevention of exposure - if there is no exposure there can be no risk. It is also very important that employees let their employers know when they become pregnant so that their employer can decide whether any extra precautions are necessary. An example would be if the job involved any significant lifting - this is a known hazard in pregnancy and adjustments to the job will be necessary so that the pregnant employee does not have to carry out such tasks.

It is also important as part of the risk assessment process that employers should review all Safety Data Sheets to see if any of the chemicals contained in the products used are a special risk to pregnant or breast feeding women. Such chemicals would have the risk phrases already referred to. If they are present there may also be information on the Safety Data Sheet indicating how any potential risk is reduced and controlled.

Details of the risk assessment and the measures taken to control risks should be communicated to all employees. This should be done as part of general health and safety training and is necessary to ensure potential hazards to women who may not be aware they are pregnant are controlled. Any risk assessment and controls need to be re-assessed in the light of new information on hazards becoming available, medical advice and concerns of the individual woman.

From a risk assessment standpoint, provided all necessary control measures are in place we believe that pregnant women should be able to continue to work safely with photochemical products. As with any photochemical or other chemical products we encourage those using such products to follow all precautionary handling instructions on the product label and Safety Data Sheet and also to ensure that adequate ventilation is available in photoprocessing areas. Pregnant women with any particular concerns related to work activities may wish to discuss these with their General Practitioners, Obstetric Unit or Occupational Health Department. Advice on specific products may be obtained from the individual company supplying the product.

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