

HEALTH MONITORING FOR EXPOSURE TO HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS

GUIDE FOR WORKERS

FEBRUARY 2013



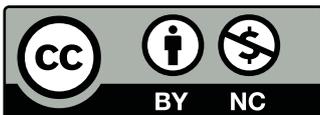
safe work australia



Safe Work Australia is an Australian Government statutory agency established in 2009. Safe Work Australia consists of representatives of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group.

Safe Work Australia works with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to improve work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements. Safe Work Australia is a national policy body, not a regulator of work health and safety. The Commonwealth, states and territories have responsibility for regulating and enforcing work health and safety laws in their jurisdiction.

ISBN 978-0-642-78723-1 [PDF]
ISBN 978-0-642-78724-8 [DOCX]



Creative Commons

Except for the logos of Safe Work Australia, SafeWork SA, Workplace Standards Tasmania, WorkSafe WA, Workplace Health and Safety QLD, NT WorkSafe, Work Cover NSW, Comcare and WorkSafe ACT, this copyright work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Australia licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/au/>

In essence, you are free to copy, communicate and adapt the work for non commercial purposes, as long as you attribute the work to Safe Work Australia and abide by the other licence terms.

Contact information

Safe Work Australia

Phone: +61 2 6121 5317

Email: info@swa.gov.au

Website: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
What is health monitoring?	2
How do I know when health monitoring will be required?	2
When is health monitoring required?	3
Who does health monitoring?	4
Who pays for health monitoring?	4
Will I be consulted on matters relating to health monitoring?	4
What information is contained in my health monitoring report?	5
What if tests show I have been exposed to hazardous chemicals?	5
Who has access to health monitoring records?	6
How long are records kept for?	6
Can I refuse health monitoring?	6
Further information	7

HEALTH MONITORING FOR EXPOSURE TO HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS - GUIDE FOR WORKERS

Introduction

The Work Health and Safety (WHS) Regulations have specific duties for a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU). The person must provide health monitoring to workers if the worker is carrying out ongoing work at a workplace using, handling, generating or storing hazardous chemicals, or asbestos.

What is health monitoring?

Health monitoring means monitoring of a person to identify changes in the person's health status because of exposure to certain substances.

Health monitoring may include:

- consultation, for example, answering questions regarding previous occupational and medical history or lifestyle, for example dietary, smoking and drinking habits and discussing with the worker how this may affect their health.
- a physical examination, for example skin checks or a spirometry (lung function) test
- clinical tests, for example, urine or blood samples
- X-rays.

How do I know when health monitoring will be required?

The PCBU, who is usually your employer, should inform you about health monitoring requirements before you start work and provide you with the following information:

- what is involved in the health monitoring program, for example the frequency of testing and which tests are necessary
- what health monitoring aims to achieve and its benefits
- how to report symptoms
- potential health effects from exposure
- record keeping requirements
- a copy of the health monitoring report.

When is health monitoring required?

Health monitoring is required under work health and safety laws where there is *significant risk* to your health due to workplace exposure to the following hazardous chemicals.

- Acrylonitrile
- Arsenic (inorganic)
- Asbestos
- Benzene
- Cadmium
- Chromium (inorganic)
- Creosote
- Crystalline silica
- Isocyanates
- Lead (inorganic)
- Mercury (inorganic)
- 4,4'-Methylene bis(2-chloroaniline) (MOCA)
- Organophosphate pesticides
- Pentachlorophenol (PCP)
- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH)
- Thallium
- Vinyl chloride

Health monitoring is also required for other hazardous chemicals not listed above where there is a significant risk to health and appropriate and valid test methods are available.

The PCBU must give you information about health monitoring requirements. This must be done before you commence work using, handling, generating or storing a hazardous chemical or asbestos.

Significant risk means exposure to the chemical or asbestos is likely to be hazardous to your health. The PCBU must determine whether there is a significant risk, taking into account a number of factors including:

- the level of toxicity
- the likely level of exposure during work activities
- the types of processes used to handle the chemicals or asbestos at work
- the control measures in place, for example ventilation systems.

Risks may be considered significant if the likelihood of exposure is high and it is reasonably foreseeable that leaks or spills of a hazardous chemical might occur or if the substance used is highly toxic. A risk may not be considered significant, and therefore health monitoring would not be required if, for example, a chemical process is completely enclosed or where you are completely isolated from the hazardous chemical or asbestos.

Air monitoring, which involves measuring the amount of a hazardous chemical or substance in the atmosphere at the workplace, may be used by the PCBU to determine the effectiveness of control measures, the extent of your exposure and to assess any risks. The PCBU must make air monitoring results available to workers affected. A health and safety representative may request a review of control measures if the measures in place are inadequate and there is a reasonable concern about a hazard to your health.

Because health monitoring is aimed at measuring potential changes to your health, it is necessary to assess your health before you start working with the above chemicals. This is known as “baseline” monitoring. Baseline monitoring may involve a physical examination and in some cases, testing of urine, mucous or blood samples, but this depends on which chemical or substance you may be exposed to.

Who does health monitoring?

Health monitoring must be performed by, or under the supervision of, a registered medical practitioner with experience in health monitoring. Not all of the tests and procedures performed during a health monitoring program need to be carried out by the medical practitioner. Some can be performed by other suitably qualified people, for example an occupational nurse may ask you general questions about your medical history, conduct skin checks and collect urine or blood samples. Although you will be consulted about the choice of medical practitioner used for the health monitoring, in most cases it will not be your own medical practitioner unless they have the necessary experience to do the work.

In some cases, you may be able to perform self-checks, for example by checking your skin or noticing whether you suffer dizziness when using a particular chemical. If you feel your health is at risk or if do not feel well and think that this may be related to the use of or exposure to chemicals within the workplace, you should always report this to your PCBU and the supervising medical practitioner.

The registered medical practitioner will advise you of the symptoms that can result from exposure to hazardous chemicals within the workplace.

Who pays for health monitoring?

The PCBU who engages you must pay all the expenses related to your health monitoring program. These expenses include:

- doctor’s fees
- testing and analysis costs
- travel costs.

The PCBU must also allow you paid time off work to attend medical appointments for any testing that is needed.

Will I be consulted on matters relating to health monitoring?

Yes. The PCBU must consult with you on all matters related to health monitoring, including the selection of the registered medical practitioner who will perform or supervise the health monitoring program.

What information is contained in my health monitoring report?

The report must include:

- your details, the name and address of the business or undertaking you are working for, and the name of the registered medical practitioner
- any test results that indicate whether or not you have been exposed to a hazardous chemical
- any advice that test results indicate that you may have a disease, injury or illness as a result of carrying out the work involving a chemical that triggered the requirement for health monitoring
- any recommendations and actions requiring new or changed control measures or medical counselling, including whether you can continue using or handling the chemical.

The medical practitioner must provide a health monitoring report to the PCBU. This report should only contain information or advice about test results and recommendations on what action should be taken, including whether you can continue to carry out your work using, handling, generating or storing hazardous chemicals that triggered the requirement for health monitoring.

The report should not contain confidential information on your general health status unless there is an obligation that your PCBU should know. The report should not contain details of medical conditions which you disclose to, or are diagnosed as having by, the medical practitioner conducting the health monitoring if the condition has no relevance or bearing on the work you are performing. Details of pre-existing medical conditions can only be included in the report with your written permission. If you do have a pre-existing medical condition which could make the health effects of chemicals you are working with worse, your PCBU should be made aware of this so measures can be put in place to minimise your risk of exposure.

The medical practitioner should let you know the results of health monitoring and will send a copy of the report to your PCBU. You will receive a copy of the report from the PCBU.

What if tests show I have been exposed to hazardous chemicals?

If the health monitoring report shows you have been exposed to a hazardous chemical at work and this has caused you to contract a disease, injury or illness, the PCBU is required to consult with you about what will happen next.

This will include actions that can be taken to improve your health, whether ongoing monitoring or treatment is required, whether you can continue to work with that particular chemical or if you need to be reassigned to a different work area where you won't be exposed to the chemical. Concerns you have about your ongoing health should be discussed with the medical practitioner.

Adverse health monitoring results means the PCBU must take action to minimise your exposure. For example, the PCBU will be required to review the control measures in place in order to eliminate or minimise further exposure to hazardous chemicals.

The PCBU must also provide a copy of an adverse health monitoring report to the regulator.

Who has access to health monitoring records?

Your health monitoring records cannot be disclosed to another person without your written permission, except in very limited circumstances, for example:

- the regulator
- any other PCBU who has a responsibility to provide you with health monitoring
- another person who must keep the record confidential under a duty of professional confidentiality, for example another medical practitioner involved in the health monitoring.

The PCBU must provide you with a copy of your health monitoring report for you to keep. This is particularly important where you move to another job where health monitoring is required.

The report cannot be used for any purpose other than health monitoring. Similarly, blood or tissue samples, X-rays, questionnaires or other samples taken for health monitoring must not be used for any other purpose.

How long are records kept for?

Health monitoring records for workers must be kept for at least 30 years after the record is made, even if you move to employment at another workplace. Due to the long period of time it can take for diseases caused by exposure to asbestos to develop, health monitoring records for asbestos must be kept for at least 40 years. It is a good idea to keep copies of your reports yourself for as long as possible and let any new doctor you visit know that you have been subject to health monitoring in the past.

Can I refuse health monitoring?

You must follow any reasonable instruction given by your PCBU to allow them to comply with their health monitoring duties. If you refuse, you may be contravening your duties under the Work Health and Safety Act.

Further information

Further information on health monitoring requirements, including information on individual scheduled chemicals, can be found in the following publications which are available from the Safe Work Australia website:

- *Health Monitoring for Exposure to Hazardous Chemicals: Guide for Medical Practitioners*
- *Health Monitoring for Exposure to Hazardous Chemicals: Guide for Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking*
- *Hazardous Chemicals Requiring Health Monitoring.*

