

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

COMFORT AND HYGIENE GUIDANCE FOR MINERAL WOOL

Mineral wool is insulation material made from glass wool, rock (stone) wool or slag wool fibres, usually bonded with a small quantity of cured thermosetting resin. It is generally inert, compatible with most other materials and presents little or no risk to health. It is, however, classified as a skin irritant since, in a small number of cases, mineral wool products can cause temporary discomfort due to the mechanical itching effect of coarse fibres in the product. This guidance sheet indicates how to minimise any such effects.

DUST CONTROL AND EXPOSURE

Mineral wool is classified as irritating to the skin by the CHIP Regulations, and is currently subject to a Maximum Exposure Limit (MEL) of 5mg/m³, total dust, 8 hour time-weighted average. In the majority of applications this limit will not be reached but each first-time use of a product in a given application must be assessed for compliance with COSHH. Examples of applications where the MEL may be exceeded, and where respiratory protection may be required, include application of blowing wools in lofts and the installation or removal of insulation in confined spaces with limited ventilation. Removal of old insulation from hot vessels may require greater care.

When cutting mineral wool to shape, sharp knives or hand tools are recommended and not power tools unless local exhaust ventilation (extraction) is also provided to minimise dust generation. When cleaning up after work with mineral wool use either a vacuum cleaning device or dampen the work area with a water spray to prevent any dust becoming airborne. Mineral wool waste is not classified as hazardous waste and can be disposed of in normal waste collection facilities, but it may be convenient to place off-cuts and sweepings into plastic bags for disposal.

PERSONAL PROTECTION AND HYGIENE

Respiratory Protection: Although mineral wool fibres are not linked to respiratory disease, the application of products, particularly in lofts or confined spaces, may generate or disturb respirable dust. Inhalation of any form of dust should be avoided. It is recommended that, in such cases, a suitable disposable face mask complying with BS EN149 Type FFP1 or FFP2 be worn.

Skin Irritation: Should skin irritation be experienced, it can be minimised, or sometimes prevented, by rinsing hands or other parts under running water before applying soap when washing.

Barrier Creams: Use of these is a matter of personal choice, although most people prefer not to use them.

Clothing: Wear loose fitting clothing, especially avoiding tight constrictions at the neck and wrist etc. It is recommended that work clothes be washed separately from other family laundry.

Gloves: Most kind of work gloves may be worn for improved comfort and are recommended especially for anyone who experiences discomfort.

Eye Protection: When handling or installing mineral wool products above head height, eye protection complying with BS EN166 is recommended to prevent dust or other foreign particles entering the eyes.

Personal Hygiene: In all the above, the need for adequate standards of personal hygiene should be recognised.

OTHER GUIDANCE

Eurisol UK Health Statement giving up-to-date health and regulatory information on mineral wool.

HSE Guidance Note EH46.