Gloves Must Match Chemical Hazard

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Gloves – of materials such as nitrile, poly vinyl chloride, natural rubber (latex) and butyl rubber – are an important way you can protect yourself from injury when using chemicals.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

No one glove can protect against all types of chemicals, and no one glove can protect forever against the chemical it's designed to safeguard you from. Gloves break down and deteriorate with use.

EXAMPLE
At work, John's hands were frequently immersed in solvent used to degrease parts. His hands were red, cracked and sore despite regular application of hand cream. The plant's occupational health nurse asked him what materials he handled, what gloves he was using and for how long. He hadn't discarded his gloves in almost six months, even though they were cracking. The degraded gloves allowed chemicals to pass through; the solvent was making his hands dried, cracked and sore.

She told him to continue using hand care cream but change gloves more often. He should throw gloves out as soon as they appeared worn or cracked and consult the manufacturer's chart for recommendations about the gloves he was wearing.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Your supervisor will tell you what kind of gloves you should use. The following are some of the factors to be considered in your choice of gloves:

- Assess your work and its hazards. List chemicals you use,

temperatures under which you wear gloves and whether your work might tear or puncture gloves.

- Consider how you contact the chemical. Are your hands immersed, or do you merely handle containers of chemicals? Do you need good flexibility and sensitivity when handling the chemicals? How long will you use the chemical or be in contact with it routinely? What are effects of skin exposure? Will you come into contact with a variety of chemicals at the same time?
- Use that information to select the correct glove. You may need a layered glove made from more than one material to protect you from all of the chemicals you use. The material safety data sheet (MSDS) may recommend gloves you should wear with the chemical you use. Many glove manufacturers provide charts that tell which products are best for use with a specific chemical.

FINAL WORD

Follow your company safety program’s directions about which gloves to use, how to care for them and how often to dispose of them. The goal is to keep your hands safe from chemical exposure.