

Occupational Health Guideline for Phosphoric Acid

INTRODUCTION

This guideline is intended as a source of information for employees, employers, physicians, industrial hygienists, and other occupational health professionals who may have a need for such information. It does not attempt to present all data; rather, it presents pertinent information and data in summary form.

SUBSTANCE IDENTIFICATION

- Formula: H_3PO_4
- Synonyms: White phosphoric acid; ortho-phosphoric acid; 85% phosphoric acid; meta-phosphoric acid
- Appearance and odor: Viscous, colorless, odorless liquid which can solidify at temperatures below 21 C (70 F).

PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LIMIT (PEL)

The current OSHA standard for phosphoric acid is 1 milligram of phosphoric acid per cubic meter of air (mg/m^3) averaged over an eight-hour work shift.

HEALTH HAZARD INFORMATION

• Routes of exposure

Phosphoric acid can affect the body if it is inhaled or if it comes in contact with the eyes or skin. It can also affect the body if it is swallowed.

• Effects of overexposure

1. *Short-term Exposure:* Solid phosphoric acid or its solutions may cause skin burns. Contact with the eyes may produce irritation and eye burns. Exposure to phosphoric acid vapor or mist may cause irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat.
2. *Long-term Exposure:* Repeated or prolonged exposure may cause irritation of the skin.
3. *Reporting Signs and Symptoms:* A physician should be contacted if anyone develops any signs or symptoms and suspects that they are caused by exposure to phosphoric acid.

• Recommended medical surveillance

The following medical procedures should be made available to each employee who is exposed to phosphoric acid at potentially hazardous levels:

1. *Initial Medical Screening:* Employees should be screened for history of certain medical conditions (listed below) which might place the employee at increased risk from phosphoric acid exposure.

—Chronic respiratory disease: In persons with impaired pulmonary function, especially those with obstructive airway diseases, the breathing of phosphoric acid dust or mist might cause exacerbation of symptoms due to its irritant properties.

—Skin disease: Phosphoric acid dust, mist, or solutions may cause dermatitis. Persons with pre-existing skin disorders may be more susceptible to the effects of this agent.

2. *Periodic Medical Examination:* Any employee developing the above-listed conditions should be referred for further medical examination.

• Summary of toxicology

Phosphoric acid mist is an irritant to the eyes, upper respiratory tract, and skin. The solid is especially irritating to skin in the presence of moisture. Unacclimated workers could not endure exposure to fumes of phosphorus pentoxide (the anhydride of phosphoric acid) at a concentration of $100 mg/m^3$; exposure to concentrations between 3.6 and $11.3 mg/m^3$ produced coughing. Concentrations of 0.8 to $5.4 mg/m^3$ were noticeable but not uncomfortable. There is no evidence that phosphorus poisoning can result from contact with phosphoric acid. The risk of pulmonary edema resulting from the inhalation of mist or spray is remote. A dilute solution buffered to pH 2.5 caused a moderate brief stinging sensation but no injury when dropped in the human eye. A 75% solution will cause severe skin burns.

CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

• Physical data

1. Molecular weight: 98

These recommendations reflect good industrial hygiene and medical surveillance practices and their implementation will assist in achieving an effective occupational health program. However, they may not be sufficient to achieve compliance with all requirements of OSHA regulations.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service Centers for Disease Control
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
Occupational Safety and Health Administration

2. Boiling point (760 mm Hg): 260 C (500 F)
3. Specific gravity (water = 1): 1.7
4. Vapor density (air = 1 at boiling point of phosphoric acid): 3.4
5. Melting point: 21 C (70 F)
6. Vapor pressure at 20 C (68 F): 0.0285 mm Hg
7. Solubility in water, g/100 g water at 20 C (68 F): Miscible in all proportions
8. Evaporation rate (butyl acetate = 1): Not applicable

- **Reactivity**

1. Conditions contributing to instability: None
2. Incompatibilities: Contact with strong caustics can cause liberation of much heat and violent spattering. Contact with most metals causes formation of flammable and explosive hydrogen gas.
3. Hazardous decomposition products: Toxic gases and vapors (such as phosphoric acid fume) may be released when phosphoric acid decomposes.
4. Special precautions: Liquid phosphoric acid will attack some forms of plastics, rubber, and coatings.

- **Flammability**

1. Not combustible

- **Warning properties**

Phosphoric acid mist can cause irritation of the eyes and respiratory tract, according to the *Hygienic Guide*. No quantitative information is given, however. Deichmann and Gerarde note that since phosphoric acid "has a low vapor pressure at room temperature, it is not irritating to the eyes or respiratory tract, unless introduced into the atmosphere as a spray or mist."

MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT PROCEDURES

- **General**

Measurements to determine employee exposure are best taken so that the average eight-hour exposure is based on a single eight-hour sample or on two four-hour samples. Several short-time interval samples (up to 30 minutes) may also be used to determine the average exposure level. Air samples should be taken in the employee's breathing zone (air that would most nearly represent that inhaled by the employee).

- **Method**

Sampling and analyses may be performed by collection of phosphoric acid on a cellulose membrane filter, followed by leaching with hot water, chemical reaction, and spectrophotometric analysis. An analytical method for phosphoric acid is in the *NIOSH Manual of Analytical Methods*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, 1977, available from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 (GPO No. 017-033-00261-4).

RESPIRATORS

- Good industrial hygiene practices recommend that engineering controls be used to reduce environmental

concentrations to the permissible exposure level. However, there are some exceptions where respirators may be used to control exposure. Respirators may be used when engineering and work practice controls are not technically feasible, when such controls are in the process of being installed, or when they fail and need to be supplemented. Respirators may also be used for operations which require entry into tanks or closed vessels, and in emergency situations. If the use of respirators is necessary, the only respirators permitted are those that have been approved by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (formerly Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration) or by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

- In addition to respirator selection, a complete respiratory protection program should be instituted which includes regular training, maintenance, inspection, cleaning, and evaluation.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Employees should be provided with and required to use impervious clothing, gloves, face shields (eight-inch minimum), and other appropriate protective clothing necessary to prevent any possibility of skin contact with solid or liquid phosphoric acid or solutions containing greater than 1.6% ortho-phosphoric acid by weight or any concentration of meta-phosphoric acid.

- Employees should be provided with and required to use impervious clothing, gloves, face shields (eight-inch minimum), and other appropriate protective clothing necessary to prevent repeated or prolonged skin contact with solutions containing 1.6% or less ortho-phosphoric acid by weight.

- If employees' clothing may have become contaminated with solid phosphoric acid, employees should change into uncontaminated clothing before leaving the work premises.

- Clothing contaminated with phosphoric acid should be placed in closed containers for storage until it can be discarded or until provision is made for the removal of phosphoric acid from the clothing. If the clothing is to be laundered or otherwise cleaned to remove the phosphoric acid, the person performing the operation should be informed of phosphoric acid's hazardous properties.

- Where there is any possibility of exposure of an employee's body to solid or liquid phosphoric acid or solutions containing phosphoric acid, facilities for quick drenching of the body should be provided within the immediate work area for emergency use.

- Non-impervious clothing which becomes contaminated with phosphoric acid should be removed immediately and not reworn until the phosphoric acid is removed from the clothing.

- Employees should be provided with and required to use dust- and splash-proof safety goggles where there is any possibility of solid or liquid phosphoric acid or solutions containing phosphoric acid contacting the eyes.

- Where there is any possibility that employees' eyes may be exposed to solid or liquid phosphoric acid or solutions containing more than 1.6% ortho-phosphoric acid by weight, or any concentration of meta-phosphoric acid, an eye-wash fountain should be provided within the immediate work area for emergency use.

SANITATION

- Skin that becomes contaminated with phosphoric acid should be immediately washed or showered to remove any phosphoric acid.

COMMON OPERATIONS AND CONTROLS

The following list includes some common operations in which exposure to phosphoric acid may occur and control methods which may be effective in each case:

Operation	Controls	Operation	Controls
Use in manufacture of aluminum products in bright dipping operations; use in cleaning, electropolishing, and pickling in manufacture of steel, brass, bronze, and copper during surface treatment and rust-proofing operations	Process enclosure; local exhaust ventilation; personal protective equipment	Use in manufacture of food products, intermediates, and food additives; use as an antioxidant and preservative; use in wood, textile, polyurethane foam flame-retardant processing and production of flame-retardant agents	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment
Use in synthesis of intermediates in manufacture of soil fertilizers; use in manufacture of livestock and poultry feed	Process enclosure; local exhaust ventilation; personal protective equipment	Use in manufacture of cleaning preparations and disinfectants	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment
Use during synthesis of detergent and soap builders and water-treatment chemicals; use as an acidulant and flavor agent in manufacture of carbonated beverages and jellies and preserves	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment	Use as a bonding agent in manufacture of refractory bricks; use during lithography and photoengraving operations	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment
		Use as a catalyst in synthesis of other chemicals; use in synthesis of textile and leather processing chemicals, clays, ceramics, cements, and clay-thinning agents for drilling mud formulations	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment
		Use in synthesis of pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical intermediates and in the extraction of penicillin; use as a laboratory reagent	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment
		Use during manufacture of opal glass; during manufacture of dental cements and dentrifice adhesives, adhesive gums, and synthetic rubber; and in the manufacture of electric lights	Process enclosure; personal protective equipment

EMERGENCY FIRST AID PROCEDURES

In the event of an emergency, institute first aid procedures and send for first aid or medical assistance.

- **Eye Exposure**

If phosphoric acid gets into the eyes, wash eyes immediately with large amounts of water, lifting the lower and upper lids occasionally. Get medical attention immediately. Contact lenses should not be worn when working with this chemical.

- **Skin Exposure**

If phosphoric acid gets on the skin, immediately flush the contaminated skin with water. If phosphoric acid soaks through the clothing, remove the clothing immediately and flush the skin with water.

- **Breathing**

If a person breathes in large amounts of phosphoric acid, move the exposed person to fresh air at once. If breathing has stopped, perform artificial respiration. Keep the affected person warm and at rest. Get medical attention as soon as possible.

- **Swallowing**

When phosphoric acid has been swallowed and the person is conscious, give the person large quantities of water immediately. After the water has been swallowed, try to get the person to vomit by having him touch the back of his throat with his finger. Do not make an unconscious person vomit. Get medical attention immediately.

- **Rescue**

Move the affected person from the hazardous exposure. If the exposed person has been overcome, notify someone else and put into effect the established emergency rescue procedures. Do not become a casualty. Understand the facility's emergency rescue procedures and know the locations of rescue equipment before the need arises.

SPILL, LEAK, AND DISPOSAL PROCEDURES

- Persons not wearing protective equipment and clothing should be restricted from areas of spills or leaks until cleanup has been completed.

- If phosphoric acid is spilled or leaked, the following steps should be taken:

1. Ventilate area of spill or leak.
2. If in the solid form, collect spilled material in the most convenient and safe manner for reclamation or for disposal in a secured sanitary landfill.
3. If in the liquid form, collect for reclamation or absorb in vermiculite, dry sand, earth, or a similar material.

- Waste disposal method:

Liquid phosphoric acid may be disposed of by absorbing in vermiculite, dry sand, earth, or a similar material and disposing in a secured sanitary landfill.

REFERENCES

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RESPIRATORY PROTECTION FOR PHOSPHORIC ACID

Condition	Minimum Respiratory Protection* Required Above 1 mg/m ³
Particulate or Vapor Concentration	
50 mg/m ³ or less	A high efficiency particulate filter respirator with a full facepiece. Any supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece, helmet, or hood. Any self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece.
2000 mg/m ³ or less	A Type C supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode or with a full facepiece, helmet, or hood operated in continuous-flow mode.
Greater than 2000 mg/m ³ or entry and escape from unknown concentrations	Self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode. A combination respirator which includes a Type C supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure or continuous-flow mode and an auxiliary self-contained breathing apparatus operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode.
Fire Fighting	Self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode.

*Only NIOSH-approved or MSHA-approved equipment should be used.