Occupational Health Guideline for Chloroform*

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: $CHCl_3$
- Synonyms: Trichloromethane
- Appearance and odor: Colorless liquid with a pleasant, sweet odor.

PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LIMIT (PEL)

The current OSHA standard for chloroform is a ceiling level of 50 parts of chloroform per million parts of air (ppm). This may also be expressed as 240 milligrams of chloroform per cubic meter of air (mg/m^3). NIOSH has recommended that the permissible exposure limit be reduced to a ceiling level of 2 ppm averaged over a one-hour period, and that chloroform be regulated as an occupational carcinogen. The NIOSH Criteria Document for Chloroform should be consulted for more detailed information.

HEALTH HAZARD INFORMATION

- **Routes of exposure**

Chloroform 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: Chloroform vapor may cause headache, drowsiness, vomiting, dizziness, unconsciousness, irregular heart beat, and death. Liver and kidney damage may also result from exposure to chloroform vapor. When splashed in the eye, chloroform causes pain and irritation. Swallowing chloroform is followed immediately by severe burning of the mouth and throat, pain in the chest and abdomen, and vomiting. Depending on the amount swallowed, loss of consciousness and liver damage may follow.

2. Long-term Exposure: Prolonged exposure to chloroform may cause liver and kidney damage. Prolonged or repeated skin contact with the liquid may produce skin irritation.

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 chloroform.

- **Recommended medical surveillance**

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

1. Initial Medical Examination:

— A complete history and physical examination: The purpose is to detect pre-existing conditions that might place the exposed employee at increased risk, and to establish a baseline for future health monitoring. A history of, or physical signs consistent with, chronic alcoholism probably constitutes such an increased risk. Examination of liver, kidneys, and heart should be stressed. The skin should be examined for evidence of chronic disorders.

— Liver function tests: A profile of liver function should be obtained by using a medically acceptable array of biochemical tests.

— Urinalysis: Since kidney damage has also been observed from exposure, a urinalysis should be obtained to include at a minimum specific gravity, albumin, glucose, and a microscopic on centrifuged sediment.

2. Periodic Medical Examination: The aforementioned medical examinations should be repeated on an annual basis.

- **Summary of toxicology**

Chloroform vapor is a central nervous system depressant and is toxic to the liver and kidneys. It has been largely abandoned as an anesthetic agent because of the frequency of cardiac arrest during surgery and of

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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.

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delayed death due to hepatic injury. An increased incidence of cardiac arrhythmias has been demonstrated during surgery in patients anesthetized with chloroform, as compared with other anesthetic agents; vapor concentrations were of the order of 22,500 ppm. Animals showed minor and reversible injury of liver and kidneys after repeated 7-hour exposures to concentrations of chloroform as low as 25 ppm, while 50 to 85 ppm produced more severe injury. Experimental human exposures showed that 14,000 to 16,000 ppm caused rapid loss of consciousness in man; 4100 ppm or less caused serious disorientation, while single exposures of 1000 ppm caused dizziness, nausea, and aftereffects of fatigue and headache. Prolonged exposure to 80 to 240 ppm caused lassitude, digestive disturbances, and mental dullness, while 20 to 70 ppm produced milder symptoms. Of 68 chemical workers exposed regularly to concentrations of 2 to 205 ppm for 1 to 4 years, some 25% had hepatomegaly. This group of 68 exposed workers were found to be more susceptible to viral hepatitis than the general population. The hepatotoxicity of several chlorinated hydrocarbons has been shown to be potentiated by prior exposure to some aliphatic alcohols. This phenomenon has been demonstrated in mice exposed first to isopropyl alcohol by gavage and then to chloroform by intraperitoneal injection. A potentiating effect of ethyl alcohol ingestion on the toxicity of chloroform vapor in the occupational setting is suspected, but has not been proven in industrial practice. High concentrations of vapor cause conjunctival irritation and blepharospasm. Liquid chloroform splashed in the eye causes immediate burning pain and conjunctival irritation; the corneal epithelium may be injured, but regeneration is prompt, and the eye returns to normal in 1 to 3 days. The liquid has a defatting effect on the skin and may produce chronic irritation with drying and cracking. Liver tumors have been reported in animals.

CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

- **Physical data**

1. Molecular weight: 119.4
2. Boiling point (760 mm Hg): 61 C (142 F)
3. Specific gravity (water = 1): 1.49
4. Vapor density (air = 1 at boiling point of chloroform): 4.1
5. Melting point: −63.5 C (−82 F)
6. Vapor pressure at 20 C (68 F): 160 mm Hg
7. Solubility in water, g/100 g water at 20 C (68 F): 0.8
8. Evaporation rate (butyl acetate = 1): 11.6

- **Reactivity**

1. Conditions contributing to instability: In the presence of air and light, chloroform slowly reacts to form toxic phosgene and hydrogen chloride gases.
2. Incompatibilities: Chloroform reacts with strong caustics and chemically active metals such as aluminum, magnesium powder, sodium, or potassium.
3. Hazardous decomposition products: Toxic gases and vapors (such as hydrogen chloride, chlorine, phosgene, and carbon monoxide) may be released when chloroform decomposes.
4. Special precautions: Liquid chloroform will attack some forms of plastics, rubber, and coatings.

- **Flammability**

1. Not combustible

- **Warning properties**

1. Odor Threshold: Patty reports that the odor threshold of chloroform is approximately 200 to 300 ppm, and May reports an odor threshold of 200 ppm. The *Hygienic Guide*, however, gives an odor threshold of 50 ppm and states that "olfactory fatigue" occurs upon exposure.
2. Eye Irritation Level: Grant states that "in conscious individuals high concentrations of vapors of chloroform cause moderate sensation of stinging and irritation of the eyes, automatically inducing protective closure of the lids." The concentrations causing eye irritation are not mentioned. However, Patty does not give any indication that eye irritation occurs at concentrations even as high as 4096 ppm.
3. Evaluation of Warning Properties: Since there are no quantitative data relating the irritant effects of chloroform to air concentrations, and since olfactory fatigue occurs during exposure to chloroform, this material is treated as a substance with poor warning properties.

MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT PROCEDURES

- **One-Hour Exposure Evaluation**

Measurements to determine employee exposure are best taken so that the average one-hour exposure is based on a single one-hour sample. 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).

- **Ceiling Evaluation**

Measurements to determine employee ceiling exposure are best taken during periods of maximum expected airborne concentrations of chloroform. Each measurement should consist of a fifteen (15) minute sample or series of consecutive samples totalling fifteen (15) minutes in the employee's breathing zone (air that would most nearly represent that inhaled by the employee). A minimum of three (3) measurements should be taken on one work shift and the highest of all measurements taken is an estimate of the employee's exposure.

- **Method**

Sampling and analyses may be performed by collection of vapors using an adsorption tube with subsequent desorption with carbon disulfide and gas chromatographic analysis. Also, detector tubes certified by NIOSH under 42 CFR Part 84 or other direct-reading devices calibrated to measure chloroform may be used. An

analytical method for chloroform 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 skin contact with liquid chloroform, where skin contact may occur.
- Clothing wet with liquid chloroform should be placed in closed containers for storage until it can be discarded or until provision is made for the removal of chloroform from the clothing. If the clothing is to be laundered or otherwise cleaned to remove the chloroform, the person performing the operation should be informed of chloroform's hazardous properties.
- Non-impervious clothing which becomes wet with liquid chloroform should be removed promptly and not reworn until the chloroform is removed from the clothing.
- Employees should be provided with and required to use splash-proof safety goggles where liquid chloroform may contact the eyes.
- Where there is any possibility that employees' eyes may be exposed to chloroform, an eye-wash fountain should be provided within the immediate work area for emergency use.

SANITATION

- Skin that becomes wet with liquid chloroform should be promptly washed or showered with soap or mild detergent and water to remove any chloroform.
- Eating and smoking should not be permitted in areas where liquid chloroform is handled, processed, or stored.
- Employees who handle liquid chloroform should wash their hands thoroughly with soap or mild detergent and water before eating or smoking.
- Areas in which exposure to chloroform may occur should be identified by signs or other appropriate means, and access to these areas should be limited to authorized persons.

COMMON OPERATIONS AND CONTROLS

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

Operation	Controls
Use in manufacture of fluorocarbons for refrigerant propellants; manufacture of fluorocarbon resins	Process enclosure; local exhaust ventilation; general dilution ventilation
Use as an extractant solvent in manufacure of pharmaceuticals, rubber, essential oils and flavors, sterols and alkaloids, and in the recovery of fat from waste products	Local exhaust ventilation; general dilution ventilation; personal protective equipment
Use in chemical analysis and assays; veterinary uses, and in standard solutions as preservative and bactericide	Local exhaust ventilation; general dilution ventilation; personal protective equipment
Use as a general solvent in plastics, dyes, oils, waxes, rubber, cleaning and dry cleaning industries	Local exhaust ventilation; general dilution ventilation; personal protective equipment
Use as a chemical intermediate in dye, drug, and pesticide industries	Process enclosure; local exhaust ventilation; general dilution ventilation

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 chloroform gets into the eyes, wash eyes immediately with large amounts of water, lifting the lower and upper lids occasionally. If burning is present after washing, get medical attention. Contact lenses should not be worn when working with this chemical.

• **Skin Exposure**

If chloroform gets on the skin, promptly wash the contaminated skin using soap or mild detergent and water. If chloroform soaks through the clothing, remove the clothing promptly and wash the skin using soap or mild detergent and water. If irritation persists after washing, get medical attention.

• **Breathing**

If a person breathes in large amounts of chloroform, 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 chloroform has been swallowed, get medical attention immediately. If medical attention is not immediately available, get the afflicted person to vomit by having him touch the back of his throat with his finger or by giving him syrup of ipecac as directed on the package. This non-prescription drug is available at most drug stores and drug counters and should be kept with emergency medical supplies in the workplace. Do not make an unconscious person vomit.

• **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 AND LEAK PROCEDURES

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

• If chloroform is spilled or leaked, the following steps should be taken:

1. Ventilate area of spill or leak.
2. Collect for reclamation or absorb in vermiculite, dry sand, earth, or a similar material.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To find additional information on chloroform, look up chloroform in the following documents:

• Medical Surveillance for Chemical Hazards

• Respiratory Protection for Chemical Hazards

• Personal Protection and Sanitation for Chemical Hazards

• NIOSH Criteria Document for Chloroform (Revised June 1976)

These documents are available through the NIOSH Division of Technical Services, 4676 Columbia Parkway, Cincinnati, Ohio 45226.

REFERENCES

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* SPECIAL NOTE

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has evaluated the data on this chemical and has concluded that it causes cancer. See *IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risk of Chemicals to Man*, Volume 1, 1972.

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION FOR CHLOROFORM

Condition	Minimum Respiratory Protection* Required Above 50 ppm
Vapor Concentration	
500 ppm or less	Any supplied-air respirator. Any self-contained breathing apparatus.
1000 ppm or less	Any supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece, helmet, or hood. Any self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece.
Greater than 1000 ppm 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.
Escape	Any gas mask providing protection against organic vapors. Any escape self-contained breathing apparatus.

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