

Occupational Health Guideline for Toluene

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: $C_6H_5CH_3$
- Synonyms: Toluol; phenylmethane; methylbenzene
- Appearance and odor: Colorless liquid with an aromatic odor, like benzene.

PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LIMIT (PEL)

The current OSHA standard for toluene is 200 parts of toluene per million parts of air (ppm) averaged over an eight-hour work shift, and during any such work shift, 300 ppm toluene may not be exceeded except that a peak of 500 ppm toluene is permitted for 10 minutes during the eight-hour work shift. NIOSH has recommended that the permissible exposure limit be reduced to 100 ppm toluene averaged over an eight-hour work shift with a ceiling level of 200 ppm averaged over a ten-minute period. The NIOSH Criteria Document for Toluene should be consulted for more detailed information.

HEALTH HAZARD INFORMATION

• Routes of exposure

Toluene can affect the body if it is inhaled, if it comes in contact with the eyes or skin, or if it is swallowed. It may enter the body through the skin.

• Effects of overexposure

1. *Short-term Exposure:* Toluene may cause irritation of the eyes, respiratory tract, and skin. It may also cause fatigue, weakness, confusion, headache, dizziness, and drowsiness. Peculiar skin sensation may be produced

such as a "pins and needles feeling" or numbness. Very high concentrations may cause unconsciousness and death. The liquid splashed in the eye may cause irritation and temporary damage. Inhalation may also cause difficulty in seeing in bright light. If liquid toluene is splashed in the eyes, it will cause temporary irritation.

2. *Long-term Exposure:* Repeated or prolonged exposure to liquid toluene may cause drying and cracking 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 toluene.

• Recommended medical surveillance

The following medical procedures should be made available to each employee who is exposed to toluene 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. Examination of the central nervous system, liver and kidneys should be stressed. The skin should be examined for evidence of chronic disorders.

—Urinalysis: Since proper kidney function is necessary for biologic monitoring, a urinalysis should be obtained to include at a minimum specific gravity, albumin, glucose, and a microscopic on centrifuged sediment. The urine should be analyzed for hippuric acid to obtain a background level.

2. *Periodic Medical Examination:* The aforementioned medical examinations should be repeated on an annual basis. Hippuric acid level in urine may be an indicator of the level of toluene exposure.

• Summary of toxicology

Toluene vapor causes narcosis. Controlled exposure of human subjects to 200 ppm for 8 hours produced mild fatigue, weakness, confusion, lacrimation, and paresthesia; at 600 ppm for 8 hours there were also euphoria, headache, dizziness, dilated pupils and nausea; at 800

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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ppm for 8 hours, symptoms were more pronounced, and after-effects included nervousness, muscular fatigue, and insomnia persisting for several days. Severe but reversible liver and kidney injury occurred in a person who was a glue-sniffer for 3 years; the chief component of the inhaled solvent was toluene (80% V/V); other ingredients were not listed. In workers exposed for many years to concentrations in the range of 80 to 300 ppm, there was no clinical or laboratory evidence of altered liver function. Toluene exposure does not result in the hematopoietic effects caused by benzene; the myelotoxic effects previously attributed to toluene are judged by more recent investigations to be the result of concurrent exposure to benzene present as a contaminant in the commercial toluene used. Most of the toluene absorbed from inhalation is metabolized to benzoic acid, conjugated with glycine in the liver to form hippuric acid, and excreted in the urine; the average amount of hippuric acid excreted in the urine by individuals not exposed to toluene is approximately 0.7 to 1.0 g/l of urine. The liquid splashed in the eyes of two workers caused transient corneal damage and conjunctival irritation; complete recovery occurred within 48 hours. Repeated or prolonged skin contact with liquid toluene has a defatting action, causing drying, fissuring, and dermatitis.

CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

• Physical data

1. Molecular weight: 92.1
2. Boiling point (760 mm Hg): 111 C (231 F)
3. Specific gravity (water = 1): 0.86
4. Vapor density (air = 1 at boiling point of toluene): 3.14
5. Melting point: -95 C (-139 F)
6. Vapor pressure at 20 C (68 F): 22 mm Hg
7. Solubility in water, g/100 g water at 20 C (68 F): 0.05
8. Evaporation rate (butyl acetate = 1): 2.24

• Reactivity

1. Conditions contributing to instability: Containers may burst at elevated temperatures.
2. Incompatibilities: Contact with strong oxidizers may cause fires and explosions.
3. Hazardous decomposition products: Toxic gases and vapors (such as carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide) may be released in a fire involving toluene.
4. Special precautions: Toluene will attack some forms of plastics, rubber, and coatings.

• Flammability

1. Flash point: 4 C (40 F) (closed cup)
2. Autoignition temperature: 480 C (896 F)
3. Flammable limits in air, % by volume: Lower: 1.27; Upper: 7.1
4. Extinguishant: Carbon dioxide, dry chemical, foam

• Warning properties

1. Odor Threshold: The American National Stand-

ards Institute (ANSI) states that "the odor of toluene is detectable by most people at concentrations in the range of 10 to 15 ppm. The odor has little value as a warning property."

Patty points out that olfactory fatigue occurs rapidly upon exposure to toluene.

2. Eye Irritation Level: Grant states that "the vapors of toluene cause noticeable sensation of irritation to human eyes at 300 to 400 ppm in air, but even at 800 ppm irritation is slight."

ANSI reports that "irritation of eyes, mucous membranes, and upper respiratory tract may occur while workers are exposed to low concentrations of toluene. There is a considerable range of variation (100 to 500 ppm) between individuals, some finding any concentration of toluene objectionable. Commercial grades of toluene vary in irritant properties."

3. Evaluation of Warning Properties: Because of its irritant effects, toluene is judged to have good warning properties.

MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT PROCEDURES

• Eight-Hour Exposure Evaluation

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).

• Ceiling Evaluation

Measurements to determine employee ceiling exposure are best taken during periods of maximum expected airborne concentrations of toluene. Each measurement should consist of a ten (10) minute sample or series of consecutive samples totalling ten (10) 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.

• Peak Above Ceiling Evaluation

Measurements to determine employee peak exposure should be taken during periods of maximum expected airborne concentration of toluene. Each measurement should consist of a 10-minute sample or a series of consecutive samples totalling 10 minutes in the employee's breathing zone (air that would most nearly represent that inhaled by the employee). A minimum of three 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 a subsequent desorption of toluene 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 toluene may be used. An analytical method for toluene 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).

Methods for Set V" (order number PB 262 524).

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

SANITATION

- Skin that becomes wet with liquid toluene should be promptly washed or showered with soap or mild detergent and water to remove any toluene.
- Employees who handle liquid toluene should wash their hands thoroughly with soap or mild detergent and water before eating or smoking.

COMMON OPERATIONS AND CONTROLS

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

Operation	Controls
Use as a solvent in pharmaceutical, chemical, rubber, and plastics industries; as a thinner for paints, lacquer, coatings, and dyes; as a paint remover; insecticides	Process enclosure; general dilution ventilation; local exhaust ventilation; personal protective equipment
Use as starting material and intermediate in organic chemical and chemical synthesis industries	Process enclosure; general dilution ventilation; local exhaust ventilation; personal protective equipment
Use in manufacture of artificial leather; fabric and paper coatings; photogravure ink production; spray surface coating; as a diluent (cellulose ester lacquers)	Process enclosure; general dilution ventilation; local exhaust ventilation; personal protective equipment
Use as constituent in formulation of automotive and aviation fuels	Process enclosure; general dilution ventilation; local exhaust ventilation; 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 liquid toluene gets into the eyes, wash eyes immediately with large amounts of water, lifting the lower and upper lids occasionally. If irritation is present after washing, get medical attention. Contact lenses should not be worn when working with this chemical.

• Skin Exposure

If liquid toluene gets on the skin, promptly wash the contaminated skin using soap or mild detergent and

water. If liquid toluene soaks through the clothing, remove the clothing immediately 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 toluene, 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 toluene has been swallowed, get medical attention immediately. Do not attempt to make the exposed 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, 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 toluene is spilled or leaked, the following steps should be taken:

1. Remove all ignition sources.
2. Ventilate area of spill or leak.
3. For small quantities, absorb on paper towels. Evaporate in a safe place (such as a fume hood). Allow sufficient time for evaporating vapors to completely clear the hood ductwork. Burn the paper in a suitable location away from combustible materials. Large quantities can be reclaimed or collected and atomized in a suitable combustion chamber. Toluene should not be allowed to enter a confined space, such as a sewer, because of the possibility of an explosion. Sewers designed to preclude the formation of explosive concentrations of toluene vapors are permitted.

• **Waste disposal method:**

Toluene may be disposed of by atomizing in a suitable combustion chamber.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To find additional information on toluene, look up toluene 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 Toluene (July 1973)

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

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RESPIRATORY PROTECTION FOR TOLUENE

Condition	Minimum Respiratory Protection* Required Above 200 ppm
Vapor Concentration	
500 ppm or less	Any chemical cartridge respirator with an organic vapor cartridge(s). Any supplied-air respirator. Any self-contained breathing apparatus.
1000 ppm or less	A chemical cartridge respirator with a full facepiece and an organic vapor cartridge(s).
2000 ppm or less	A gas mask with a chin-style or a front- or back-mounted organic vapor canister. Any supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece, helmet, or hood. Any self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece.
Greater than 2000 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.

