



Nail salons and hazardous substances – Safety issues

WorkSafe campaign – Hazardous substances in nail salons

WorkSafe visited 82 nail salons between 2012 and 2016 to assess hazardous substances compliance. Air monitoring was conducted in a small number of salons. This publication provides information for nail salon managers and workers based on the findings of this work.

Background

The nail salon industry has grown substantially over the last decade. The work involves the use of hazardous substances including polymers, monomers and solvents to apply false nails to clients' fingers or to polish the clients' nails. Monomers used include ethyl methacrylate (EMA) and methyl methacrylate (MMA), which can cause irritation and allergic skin reactions. MMA has been recommended for prohibition in this application as it bonds too strongly with the client's nails and increases the risk of nail damage and infection.

What we found

- Chemicals not labelled to the requirements of the OSH legislation;
- Material safety data sheets (MSDS) not always available;
- Risk assessments for hazardous substances not conducted or recorded;
- Workers not informed or trained in relation to chemical hazards;
- Unsuitable personal protective equipment in use, for example surgical masks used instead of dust masks, and latex gloves used instead of nitrile gloves.
 - Surgical masks are not designed to prevent inhalation of dusts.
 - Latex gloves are not solvent resistant and can increase the risk of latex allergies developing.
- Some salons were poorly ventilated. For example, air conditioning systems were not running or did not include enough fresh air, or there was no local extraction ventilation close to the work areas where chemicals were used.
- Salons that had installed local extraction ventilation systems did not always inspect and maintain the system to ensure it was still working.
- Many workers have English as a second language and would benefit from OSH information in their first language.
- Ethyl methacrylate and methyl methacrylate were detected in air in some salons. The levels were between 0-10% of the workplace exposure standard. The workplace exposure standard is the airborne concentration of a substance that must not be exceeded at a workplace. Workplace exposure standards are set to protect most workers from adverse health effects, however chemical exposure must also be minimised as far as practicable.
- Other volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as solvents in nail polish or adhesives, were also detected in most salons tested. Total VOCs were in the 17-30 mg/m³ range, significantly higher than indoor air quality goals. This may cause irritation to some workers or clients. Some VOCs are associated with chronic health risks and levels should be minimised as far as practicable.

Further information

- [Nail Technicians – Bulletin](#) (English or Vietnamese language)
- [Hepatitis B in the Workplace](#) – Frequently Asked Questions
- [Hazardous Substances Compliance Tool](#) (includes templates)

Checklists

Hazardous substances safety checklist			
	yes	no	n/a
Safer chemicals are selected as far as practicable.			
Products containing MMA are not used.			
A hazardous substances register, containing an index and the current material safety data sheet for each hazardous substance used, is readily available at the workplace.			
Decanted hazardous substances are labelled with at least the substance name, risk and safety phrases.			
Risk assessments have been conducted for the use of hazardous substances and the results recorded.			
Workers have been informed and trained in relation to hazardous substances, including potential health effects and effective controls, in an appropriate language, and records of the training have been kept.			
Where there is a dust hazard, Class P1 or Class P2 respirators manufactured in accordance with AS1716 are supplied and used (not surgical masks).			
Where there is a risk of solvent inhalation (eg during decanting), a half-face respirator with an organic vapour filter is used.			
Respirator filters are stored in a sealed container and replaced periodically.			
Where there is a risk of skin contact with chemicals, a chemically resistant glove is used (eg nitrile).			
Latex gloves are not used (due to allergy risk and low chemical resistance).			
Chemical containers are covered when not in use to minimise vapours.			
Salon has good general ventilation (eg air-conditioning with a proportion of fresh air).			
Salon has local extraction ventilation near areas where chemicals are used (eg downdraft tables with extracted air either filtered or exhausted outside the salon).			
Local extraction ventilation systems are regularly inspected and maintained (eg filters changed).			
Eye wash equipment is available.			
Workers with medical conditions are individually assessed and extra controls used where necessary to reduce chemical exposure.			

Hygiene safety checklist			
	yes	no	n/a
Food is stored separately from chemicals.			
Workers wash hands between clients.			
Disposable tools are not re-used.			
Re-usable tools with a risk of contact with blood are sterilised after use.			
Workers have been vaccinated against Hepatitis B virus (recommended as best practice).			

UV lamps safety checklist			
	yes	no	n/a
Sunscreen is used to reduce UV exposure.			
UV lamps are not used to sterilise nail tools (this is not effective).			