



Nail technicians

This information bulletin is intended to provide guidance to employers, employees and the self-employed in the nail industry

What safety and health hazards do nail technicians face?

Nail technicians perform manicures and pedicures, enhance natural nails and apply and maintain artificial nails. Nail technicians may work in salons, from their own home or visit clients' homes. They may be employees, self-employed or engaged on a contract basis.

Like many other workers, nail technicians may be exposed to hazards that place them at risk of injury or harm to their health. Some examples of hazards in the nail industry are:

- physical hazards such as electricity, heat, cold, trip hazards or poorly arranged workstations;
- equipment hazards such as tools used to work on artificial or natural nails;
- chemical hazards such as repeated exposure to fumes and dust, particularly if there is inadequate ventilation;
- infection hazards such as fungi or mould and diseases transmitted via body fluids; and
- psychosocial hazards such as fatigue or stress (inadequate training or supervision can contribute to stress).

Legal obligations and responsibilities

Employers, the self-employed and other people in control of workplaces are required by occupational safety and health legislation to provide a workplace where workers, clients and others at the workplace are not exposed to hazards.

Employers and main contractors also have an obligation to provide training and information to employees about hazards and risks at the workplace and ways to control them. Recognised training providers or nail manufacturers and distributors can conduct training, and the training should be kept up to date as different products and techniques emerge.

Employees and contract workers have a responsibility to protect themselves and their clients by following the employer's safe work practices. The self-employed also have a responsibility to follow safe work practices.

Hazard management

Hazard management involves the following steps:

- identify all hazards involved with the work;
- gather information about each hazard identified;
- consider how many people are likely to be exposed to each hazard and for how long;
- take into account different situations or conditions that may exist in the workplace that could increase risk, such as a change to procedures, new products or new or inexperienced staff; and
- use the information gathered to assess the potential consequences of each hazard.

Ways of managing hazards include:

- employers and staff working together to manage hazards;
- providing new staff with a safety induction and adequate supervision;
- providing appropriate furniture and tools;
- obtaining Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all chemicals used at the workplace, and ensuring they are available to staff handling the chemicals;
- ensuring all staff who handle chemicals follow the safe handling procedures in the MSDS, and receive training in the hazards of the chemical and the required procedures;
- keeping the work area clean;
- providing extraction ventilation; and
- providing protective clothing, masks and gloves where appropriate.

Working with chemicals

Chemicals may cause allergic reactions, such as dermatitis or asthma, and can be flammable, corrosive or toxic.

Ethyl methacrylate (EMA) and methyl methacrylate (MMA) are used in nail salons to attach artificial fingernails. Methacrylates have been associated with eye and mucous membrane irritation and allergic and irritant dermatitis. The risk of harmful effects from these chemicals increases with repeated and prolonged exposure.

Nail technicians may also be exposed to other products containing chemicals, such as nail polish, glues and nail polish remover.

MSDS must be obtained and kept up to date for all hazardous chemicals used at the workplace. The employer, or person in control of a workplace has a legal responsibility to ensure workers and others have access to the MSDS for any hazardous substance used at work.

The MSDS lists the ingredients and gives health information and instructions for the safe storage, use and handling of the chemicals. MSDS are available from the suppliers of the chemicals.

Ways of working safely with chemicals include:

- training and supervision of staff;
- carefully considering the content of products when selecting them;
- where possible removing a hazardous chemical from the work area, and replacing it with a less hazardous one, such as using EMA instead of MMA.
- ensuring chemicals are compatible with each other;
- following the manufacturer's instructions;
- preventing chemicals from coming in contact with the skin of clients or technicians;
- keeping the work area clean and containers closed when not in use;
- technicians should place open chemical containers so that fumes are removed by ventilation and/or extraction;
- avoiding spills, splashes and sprays of chemicals;
- promptly cleaning up any spills that occur;
- providing adequate ventilation; and
- wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Ventilation and dust control

Good ventilation should be provided to control fumes and odours from chemicals used in the nail industry. Dust from filing nails is also a hazard.

Ventilation can be provided through:

- vented manicure tables with air exhausted to the outdoors (preferable);
- extraction fans that remove air close to the source of the chemicals; or
- open windows close to the source of the fumes if mechanical ventilation is not available and chemical use is minimal.

Ensure that extracted air is removed outdoors into the open air, not just removed outside the nail salon. Salons in shopping centres should ensure that fumes and odours are not creating a health risk for other workers and members of the public at the centre.

Electric fans should not be placed on tables as they increase the amount of airborne dust from nail filing. The use of electric drills should also be kept to a minimum.

Using MMA results in very hard nails that commonly require the use of electric drills or buffers, creating excessive dust. EMA nails are softer and easily hand-finished, which reduces the amount of dust.

Preventing the spread of infections

Good hygiene is essential to minimise the risk of spreading diseases and infections from clients to technicians or technicians to clients. Standard precautions include:

- regular hand washing especially before and after performing procedures on clients, and at any time when hands become contaminated;
- protection of damaged skin by covering with a waterproof dressing or by gloves;
- the use of personal protective equipment, eg masks and gloves;
- containment of all blood and body fluids, ie confining spills, splashes and contamination of the environment and workers to the smallest amount possible; and
- cleaning and disinfecting equipment properly between clients, or using disposable equipment.

Technicians should be trained to recognise signs of infection, for example nails affected by fungi or mould. Technicians should ensure all reusable equipment is cleaned and disinfected between clients using appropriate procedures. Disposable equipment should be discarded in an appropriate manner, to ensure it does not present a risk to staff or clients.

Nail technicians should also consider being immunised or having booster shots against Hepatitis B and Tetanus. Immunisation should be discussed with a health care professional.

Workplace design

Workstations must be designed to ensure that technicians can perform their work in an unrestricted manner. Designers should consider appropriate positioning of furniture, fittings, equipment and clients, to ensure they do not obstruct the technician using the workstation. Other hazards such as noise and heat sources should also be considered when setting up a work area.

A well-designed workstation should provide enough space to allow equipment and tools to be positioned so that technicians can perform their tasks comfortably and without any muscular strain. The technicians should be able to sit in an upright, forward facing position that has good visibility, and be able to perform their tasks without unnecessary over-reaching, twisting and bending.

Mobile nail technicians

Nail technicians working in mobile vans or clients' homes also need to follow the hazard management process, including consideration of hazards specifically associated with mobile work. For example:

- when transporting flammable substances precautions should be taken to ensure they are kept in secure containers away from heat and ignition sources;
- care should be taken to avoid slips and trips when carrying equipment to or from vehicles or clients homes;
- personal security should be considered when working alone, with precautions taken such as regular phone calls to home base and use of personal duress alarms; and
- ensuring products that release fumes are only used in areas that have adequate ventilation.

Personal protective equipment

If it is not possible to eliminate the risks to health by other methods such as substituting hazardous substances with non-harmful ones or effective extraction ventilation, then personal protective equipment (PPE) should be considered.

PPE should not be the only way of controlling the risk, and is often used in conjunction with other methods. PPE should be selected in accordance with the directions in the MSDS accompanying the chemical or material being used. The associated hazards and risks of the work processes must also be considered.

Examples of PPE used in the nail industry are:

- gloves;
- aprons;
- dust masks; and
- safety glasses.

Reporting health problems

Workers who experience any adverse health effects including dermatitis, asthma or muscular strain should report this to their employer. Under the occupational safety and health laws, the employer is required to investigate the report and take appropriate action. The employer must advise the worker of the action taken.

Certain injuries and diseases must be reported to the WorkSafe Western Australia Commissioner. A list of these injuries and diseases can be found in the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996. To report these injuries or diseases call 1800 678 198.

Further information

The following publications provide further guidance on the topics covered in this bulletin:

- [First aid facilities and services, workplace amenities and facilities and personal protective clothing and equipment](#)
- Guidance note - [Working alone](#)
- Code of practice - [Manual tasks](#)
- Guidance note - [Provision of information on hazardous substances at workplaces - Material Safety Data Sheets \(MSDS\)](#)
- Guidance note - [Preparing for emergency evacuations at the workplace](#)
- Guidance note - [General duty of care](#)
- Gloves: selection, use and maintenance, WorkSafe Bulletin

In addition, the following national guidance material is available from the Australian Safety and Compensation Council at www.ascc.gov.au

- [Labelling of Workplace Substances](#) [NOHSC: 2012 (1994)]
- [Workplace Hazardous Substances](#) [NOHSC: 2007 (1994)]
- [Guidance Note for the Assessment of Health Risks Arising from the Use of Hazardous Substances in Workplaces](#) [NOHSC:3017(1994)]

Further information on training is available from:

Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Council of WA (WRAPS)
PO Box 6236
East Perth WA 6892
Tel: (08) 9481 5766
Fax: (08) 9481 5677

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