The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) is running a Europe-wide campaign during 2018 and 2019 to promote the prevention of risks from dangerous substances in the workplace. The aim is to reduce the presence of and exposure to dangerous substances in the workplace by raising awareness of these risks and looking at effective ways of preventing them.

**KEY POINTS:**

- Workplace risk assessment and prevention measures for dangerous substances need to target all employees and groups of employees with specific needs and higher levels of risk.

- The risks may be greater because these employees are inexperienced, uninformed or physically more vulnerable as they may frequently change jobs or work in sectors where awareness of safety issues are low.

- Specific groups that need to be considered are young employees and those new to the job, migrant employees, subcontractors, employees with medical conditions, pregnant and breastfeeding women and employees in service sectors with a low level of safety awareness.

- Employees who work at different locations can encounter a range of dangerous substances. Risk assessments must be communicated to all employees.

**RISK ASSESSMENT AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

**Employers must** inform their employees about the preventive and protective measures implemented to reduce, remove or control risk, and consult them on these measures.

An employer must consider:

- the layout of the workplace
- the agents workers will be exposed to
- how they will handle work equipment
- how work and processes are organised
- the extent of safety and health training required
- risks posed by particular agents, processes and types of work

**Employees must:**

- know what hazards are present in their workplace
- know what they must do to keep themselves safe
- know what action to take if there is an accident or emergency
- receive information, instruction and training on these matters
- be provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE). For more information click [here](#).
- participate in safety and health matters, e.g. by asking questions and reporting any unsafe practices or conditions
- be consulted by their employer on them
NEW OR YOUNG EMPLOYEES

Risk arises from:

- lack of experience of working in an industry or workplace
- lack of familiarity with the job and the work environment
- reluctance to raise concerns (or not knowing how to)
- being unaware of existing or potential risks

Employees new to a workplace may:

- not recognise hazards
- not be aware of rules for the use of equipment
- be unfamiliar with workplace layout, especially where site hazards may change from day to day
- ignore warning signs and rules or cut corners

SPECIAL RULES: For those under the age of 18, whether they are permanently employed or in training in the HSE, special rules apply. For more information please go to our Frequently Asked Questions FAQ 017:01 Sensitive Risk Groups –Young Persons.

PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING EMPLOYEES

Employers must assess any risks to safety or health and any possible effects on pregnancy or breastfeeding employees and take appropriate measures to eliminate or minimise the risks. These employees may be at risk from processes, working conditions, biological and chemical agents. These risks will vary depending on their health and stages of pregnancy.

These risks will be identified through the completion of the Pregnant Employee Risk Assessment Form. For further information please see Safety Advisory Guidance Note, SAGN 001:02 Completing a Pregnant Employee Risk Assessment.

Employers may need to revisit risk assessments throughout the employees pregnancy. For more guidance please go to the Frequently Asked Questions FAQ 005:03 Pregnant Employees.

WORKERS WITH MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Individuals with medical conditions may be more susceptible to the health effects caused by exposure to dangerous substances. For example some substances can cause sensitisation affecting the skin or respiratory system. Where employees have become sensitised, further exposure must be prevented. Employees with damaged skin, including open cuts or sores, are more susceptible to exposure as chemicals can enter the body directly through the open wound.

Health surveillance can help in monitoring if certain medical conditions are made worse by workplace exposure. Where this is the case, the individual’s occupational exposure patterns should be reviewed and a decision made on the need for improved control and/or the need to identify further control measures with the assistance of your local Occupational Health Professionals.

To log a request for health & safety information, advice or support please go to: www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing or http://pndchssdweb02.healthtrl.net/Health.WebAccess/ss

Alternatively contact the National Health & Safety Helpdesk on 1850 420 420 between 10:30-12:00 and 14:00 – 15.30 Hrs Monday to Friday