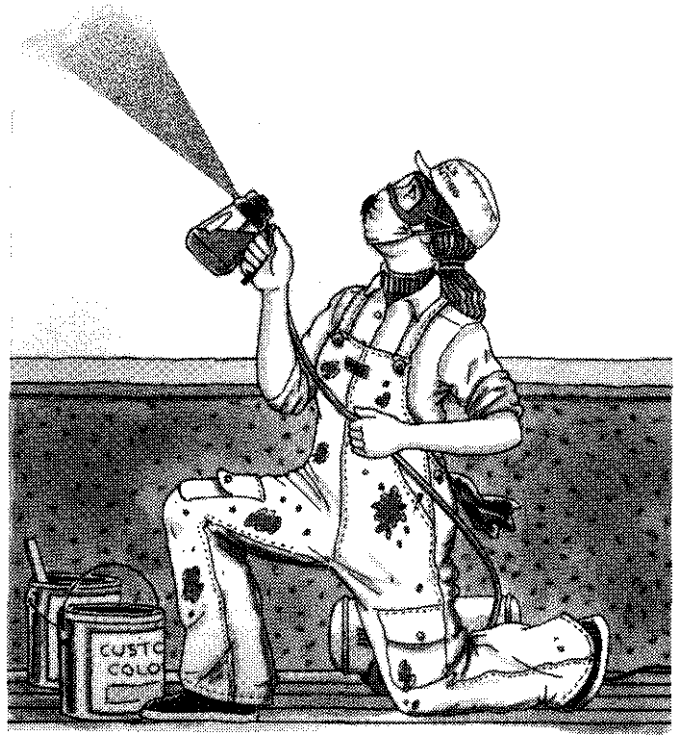
If You Work With PAINT



We don't usually think of paint **as** a hazardous chemical—after all, millions of people use paint in all sorts of situations, without wearing any special protective equipment, and they don't become ill from it—or do they? Knowing a little about the health hazards of prolonged or repeated exposure to paint substances can help you understand why OSHA requires you to protect yourself when using them.

Health Hazards of Paint

Paint contains pigments, solvents, resins and other ingredients to give it color, texture, spreadability and durability. Many of these ingredients are hazardous to your health. First among them are the solveuts, such **as** mineral spirits, naphtha and turpentine, that evaporate readily from paint exposed to the air. Even short-term exposure to these chemicals can cause dizziness, eye irritation, nausea, coughing and other symptoms. In addition, paints containing polyisocyanate hardeners can cause shortness of breath, chills and fever. Long-term exposure to paint ingredients, even when no short-term effects are noticed, can damage the kidneys, liver, blood or nervous system. Some even cause cancer and birth defects in laboratory animals.

You may work with paints for a long time with no ill effects. Suddenly you develop rashes, hives, swelling or scaling of the skin, or you begin coughing and having shortness of breath, which often leads to permanent lung damage or severe respiratory stress. This is sensitization, an allergic reaction to one of the ingredients in paint. Once you become sensitized, it is virtually impossible for you to work with the sensitizing substance again. This is why you must avoid contact with the paint in the first place by using the right protective equipment.

Other Hazards

The volatile solvents in paint are flammable. Painting in an unventilated area near an ignition source—such as cigarette, spark or static electricity—can be dangerous. Paint containers exposed to high heat may explode. And some paints contain chemicals that may react violently with other substances.

Protect Yourself

You can prevent exposure to paint chemicals by wearing the appropriate protective equipment—a respirator designed for painting, coveralls, chemical-resistant gloves and eye protections. (Some of these have layered peel-off lenses that you can remove as they get covered with paint.) Use an appropriate respirator when spraying polyurethane paints and other paints in enclosed areas. Paint in ventilated spray booths, or work in a well-ventilated area. Change the respirator cartridge according to manufacturer's guidelines.

Clean Up!

Proper cleanup means keeping containers closed, tightly sealed and properly labeled when not in use, and storing paints at the proper temperature. Dispose of empty cans and paint- or solvent-soaked **rags** in airtight receptacles. Use soap, water and a washcloth to clean hands; solvents and thinners can cause irritation, infection and severe drying of the skin, as well as toxic effects. Remove clothing soaked in solvents.

Educate Yourself

Always read the label before beginning a paint job. Use your MSDS as a guide to what hazards your paint contains, what type of protective equipment to use, and whether or not the paint may ignite easily. The MSDS will also tell you how to contain and clean up a paint spill, and what to do in case of overexposure to paint. Remember, paints are safe to use, if you use them safely.