



Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet

Common Name: **FORMALDEHYDE**

Synonyms: Formalin; Methyl Aldehyde; Methylene Oxide

Chemical Name: Formaldehyde

Date: January 2010

Revision: April 2016

CAS Number: 50-00-0

RTK Substance Number: 0946

DOT Number: UN 1198 (Solutions, Flammable)
UN 2209 (Solutions)

Description and Use

Formaldehyde is a colorless gas with a strong odor that is sold commercially in a *Methanol* and water solution. It is used in making resins, textiles, and other chemicals, and as a disinfectant, fertilizer, fungicide and embalming solution.

- ▶ **ODOR THRESHOLD = 0.05 to 1 ppm**
- ▶ Odor thresholds vary greatly. Do not rely on odor alone to determine potentially hazardous exposures.

Reasons for Citation

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is on the Right to Know Hazardous Substance List because it is cited by OSHA, ACGIH, DOT, NIOSH, NTP, DEP, IARC, IRIS, NFPA and EPA.
- ▶ This chemical is on the Special Health Hazard Substance List.

[SEE GLOSSARY ON PAGE 5.](#)

FIRST AID

Eye Contact

- ▶ Immediately flush with large amounts of water for at least 30 minutes, lifting upper and lower lids. Remove contact lenses, if worn, while flushing. Seek medical attention.

Skin Contact

- ▶ Quickly remove contaminated clothing. Immediately wash contaminated skin with large amounts of soap and water. Seek medical attention.

Inhalation

- ▶ Remove the person from exposure.
- ▶ Begin rescue breathing (using universal precautions) if breathing has stopped and CPR if heart action has stopped.
- ▶ Transfer promptly to a medical facility.
- ▶ Medical observation is recommended for 24 to 48 hours after overexposure, as pulmonary edema may be delayed.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

CHEMTREC: 1-800-424-9300

NJDEP Hotline: 1-877-927-6337

National Response Center: 1-800-424-8802

EMERGENCY RESPONDERS >>>> SEE LAST PAGE

Hazard Summary

Hazard Rating	NJDHSS	NFPA
HEALTH	4	3
FLAMMABILITY	-	4 (Solutions, Flammable) 2 (Solutions)
REACTIVITY	-	0 (Solutions)
CARCINOGEN CORROSIVE FLAMMABLE OR COMBUSTIBLE POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE CONTAINERS MAY EXPLODE IN FIRE		

Hazard Rating Key: 0=minimal; 1=slight; 2=moderate; 3=serious; 4=severe

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** can affect you when inhaled and by passing through the skin.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is a CARCINOGEN and MUTAGEN. HANDLE WITH EXTREME CAUTION.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is CORROSIVE and contact can severely irritate and burn the skin and eyes with possible eye damage.
- ▶ Exposure can irritate the nose, mouth and throat.
- ▶ Inhaling **Formaldehyde** can irritate the lungs. Higher exposures may cause a build-up of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema), a medical emergency.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** may cause a skin allergy and an asthma-like allergy.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is a FLAMMABLE GAS or SOLUTION and a DANGEROUS FIRE HAZARD.

Workplace Exposure Limits

OSHA: The legal airborne permissible exposure limit (PEL) is **0.75 ppm** averaged over an 8-hour workshift and **2 ppm**, not to be exceeded during any 15-minute work period.

NIOSH: The recommended airborne exposure limit (REL) is **0.016 ppm** averaged over a 10-hour workshift and **0.1 ppm**, not to be exceeded during any 15-minute work period.

ACGIH: The threshold limit value (TLV) is **0.3 ppm**, which should not be exceeded at any time.

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is a CARCINOGEN in humans. There may be no safe level of exposure to a carcinogen, so all contact should be reduced to the lowest possible level.
- ▶ The above exposure limits are for air levels only. When skin contact also occurs, you may be overexposed, even though air levels are less than the limits listed above.

Determining Your Exposure

- ▶ Read the product manufacturer's Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and the label to determine product ingredients and important safety and health information about the product mixture.
- ▶ For each individual hazardous ingredient, read the New Jersey Department of Health Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet, available on the RTK website (<http://nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/right-to-know>) or in your facility's RTK Central File or Hazard Communication Standard file.
- ▶ You have a right to this information under the New Jersey Worker and Community Right to Know Act, the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) Act if you are a public worker in New Jersey, and under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) if you are a private worker.
- ▶ The New Jersey Right to Know Act requires most employers to label chemicals in the workplace and requires public employers to provide their employees with information concerning chemical hazards and controls. The federal OSHA Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) and the PEOSH Hazard Communication Standard (N.J.A.C. 12:100-7) require employers to provide similar information and training to their employees.

This Fact Sheet is a summary of available information regarding the health hazards that may result from exposure. Duration of exposure, concentration of the substance and other factors will affect your susceptibility to any of the potential effects described below.

Health Hazard Information

Acute Health Effects

The following acute (short-term) health effects may occur immediately or shortly after exposure to **Formaldehyde**:

- ▶ Contact can severely irritate and burn the skin and eyes with possible eye damage. The burns may be delayed for hours after contact.
- ▶ Exposure can irritate the nose, mouth and throat.
- ▶ Inhaling **Formaldehyde** can irritate the lungs causing coughing and/or shortness of breath. Higher exposures may cause a build-up of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema), a medical emergency, with severe shortness of breath.

Chronic Health Effects

The following chronic (long-term) health effects can occur at some time after exposure to **Formaldehyde** and can last for months or years:

Cancer Hazard

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is a CARCINOGEN in humans. It has been shown to cause cancer of the nasopharynx and leukemia.
- ▶ Many scientists believe there is no safe level of exposure to a carcinogen.

Reproductive Hazard

- ▶ There is limited evidence that **Formaldehyde** may damage the developing fetus and affect female fertility.

Other Effects

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** can irritate the lungs. Repeated exposure may cause bronchitis to develop with coughing, phlegm, and/or shortness of breath.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** may cause a skin allergy. If allergy develops, very low future exposure can cause itching and a skin rash.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** may cause an asthma-like allergy. Future exposure can cause asthma attacks with shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, and/or chest tightness.

Medical

Medical Testing

For frequent or potentially high exposure (half the PEL or greater), the following are recommended before beginning work and at regular times after that:

- ▶ Lung function tests

If symptoms develop or overexposure is suspected, the following are recommended:

- ▶ Evaluation by a qualified allergist can help diagnose skin allergy.
- ▶ Consider chest x-ray after acute overexposure
- ▶ Exam of eyes and vision

OSHA requires your employer to provide you and your doctor with a copy of the OSHA **Formaldehyde** Standard (29 CFR 1910.1048).

Any evaluation should include a careful history of past and present symptoms with an exam. Medical tests that look for damage already done are not a substitute for controlling exposure.

Request copies of your medical testing. You have a legal right to this information under the OSHA Access to Employee Exposure and Medical Records Standard (29 CFR 1910.1020).

Mixed Exposures

- ▶ Smoking can cause heart disease, lung cancer, emphysema, and other respiratory problems. It may worsen respiratory conditions caused by chemical exposure. Even if you have smoked for a long time, stopping now will reduce your risk of developing health problems.

Workplace Controls and Practices

Very toxic chemicals, or those that are reproductive hazards or sensitizers, require expert advice on control measures if a less toxic chemical cannot be substituted. Control measures include: (1) enclosing chemical processes for severely irritating and corrosive chemicals, (2) using local exhaust ventilation for chemicals that may be harmful with a single exposure, and (3) using general ventilation to control exposures to skin and eye irritants. For further information on workplace controls, consult the NIOSH document on Control Banding at www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ctrlbanding/.

The following work practices are also recommended:

- ▶ Label process containers.
- ▶ Provide employees with hazard information and training.
- ▶ Monitor airborne chemical concentrations.
- ▶ Use engineering controls if concentrations exceed recommended exposure levels.
- ▶ Provide eye wash fountains and emergency showers.
- ▶ Wash or shower if skin comes in contact with a hazardous material.
- ▶ Always wash at the end of the workshift.
- ▶ Change into clean clothing if clothing becomes contaminated.
- ▶ Do not take contaminated clothing home.
- ▶ Get special training to wash contaminated clothing.
- ▶ Do not eat, smoke, or drink in areas where chemicals are being handled, processed or stored.
- ▶ Wash hands carefully before eating, smoking, drinking, applying cosmetics or using the toilet.

In addition, the following may be useful or required:

- ▶ Specific actions are required for this chemical by OSHA. Refer to the OSHA **Formaldehyde** Standard (29 CFR 1910.1048).
- ▶ Before entering a confined space where **Formaldehyde** may be present, check to make sure that an explosive concentration does not exist.
- ▶ Where possible, transfer **Formaldehyde** from cylinders or other containers to process containers in an enclosed system.

Personal Protective Equipment

The OSHA Personal Protective Equipment Standard (29 CFR 1910.132) requires employers to determine the appropriate personal protective equipment for each hazard and to train employees on how and when to use protective equipment.

The following recommendations are only guidelines and may not apply to every situation.

Gloves and Clothing

- ▶ Avoid skin contact with **Formaldehyde**. Wear personal protective equipment made from material which can not be permeated or degraded by this substance. Safety equipment suppliers and manufacturers can provide recommendations on the most protective glove and clothing material for your operation.

- ▶ Safety equipment manufacturers recommend Butyl, Nitrile, Neoprene and Viton for gloves; Tychem® fabrics for **Formaldehyde** in *solution*, and Tychem® BR, Responder® and TK for **Formaldehyde gas**, or the equivalent, as protective clothing materials.
- ▶ All protective clothing (suits, gloves, footwear, headgear) should be clean, available each day, and put on before work.

Eye Protection

- ▶ Wear non-vented, impact resistant goggles when working with fumes, gases, or vapors.
- ▶ Wear a face shield along with goggles when working with corrosive, highly irritating or toxic substances.
- ▶ Do not wear contact lenses when working with this substance.

Respiratory Protection

Improper use of respirators is dangerous. Respirators should only be used if the employer has implemented a written program that takes into account workplace conditions, requirements for worker training, respirator fit testing, and medical exams, as described in the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).

- ▶ Where the potential exists for exposure over **0.016 ppm**, use a NIOSH approved supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode. For increased protection use in combination with an auxiliary self-contained breathing apparatus or an emergency escape air cylinder.
- ▶ Exposure to **20 ppm** is immediately dangerous to life and health. If the possibility of exposure above **20 ppm** exists, use a NIOSH approved self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode equipped with an emergency escape air cylinder.

Fire Hazards

If employees are expected to fight fires, they must be trained and equipped as stated in the OSHA Fire Brigades Standard (29 CFR 1910.156).

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is a FLAMMABLE GAS or COMBUSTIBLE SOLUTION.
- ▶ Use dry chemical, CO₂, water spray or alcohol-resistant foam as extinguishing agents.
- ▶ Use water spray to reduce vapors.
- ▶ POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE.
- ▶ CONTAINERS MAY EXPLODE IN FIRE.
- ▶ Use water spray to keep fire-exposed containers cool.

Spills and Emergencies

If employees are required to clean-up spills, they must be properly trained and equipped. The OSHA Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard (29 CFR 1910.120) may apply.

If **Formaldehyde** in *solution* is spilled, take the following steps:

- ▶ Evacuate personnel and secure and control entrance to the area.
- ▶ Eliminate all ignition sources.
- ▶ Absorb liquids in vermiculite, dry sand, earth, or a similar material and place into sealed containers for disposal.
- ▶ Ventilate and wash area after clean-up is complete.
- ▶ DO NOT wash into sewer.

If **Formaldehyde** *gas* is leaked, take the following steps:

- ▶ Evacuate personnel and secure and control entrance to the area.
- ▶ Eliminate ignition sources.
- ▶ Ventilate area of leak to disperse the gas.
- ▶ Stop flow of *gas*. If source of leak is a cylinder and the leak cannot be stopped in place, remove the leaking cylinder to a safe place in the open air, and repair leak or allow cylinder to empty.
- ▶ Keep **Formaldehyde** out of confined spaces, such as sewers, because of the possibility of an explosion.
- ▶ It may be necessary to contain and dispose of **Formaldehyde** as a HAZARDOUS WASTE. Contact your state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or your regional office of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for specific recommendations.

Handling and Storage

Prior to working with **Formaldehyde** you should be trained on its proper handling and storage.

- ▶ **Formaldehyde** reacts violently with NITROGEN OXIDES; OXIDIZING AGENTS (such as PERCHLORATES, PEROXIDES, PERMANGANATES, CHLORATES, NITRATES, CHLORINE, BROMINE and FLUORINE); mixtures of PERCHLORIC ACID and ANILINE; NITROMETHANE; MAGNESIUM CARBONATE; and HYDROGEN PEROXIDE.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** reacts with PHENOL and HYDROGEN CHLORIDE to form toxic *Bis(Chloromethyl) Ether*.
- ▶ **Formaldehyde** is not compatible with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC); STRONG BASES (such as SODIUM HYDROXIDE and POTASSIUM HYDROXIDE); IODINE; IRON; SILVER; ISOCYANATES; AMINES; ANHYDRIDES; and LIQUID OXYGEN.
- ▶ Pure **Formaldehyde** may polymerize (self-react).
- ▶ Store in tightly closed containers in a cool, well-ventilated area away from LIGHT.
- ▶ Sources of ignition, such as smoking and open flames, are prohibited where **Formaldehyde** is used, handled, or stored.
- ▶ Metal containers involving the transfer of **Formaldehyde** should be grounded and bonded.
- ▶ Use only non-sparking tools and equipment, especially when opening and closing containers of **Formaldehyde**.

Occupational Health Information Resources

The New Jersey Department of Health and Occupational Health Service, offers multiple services in occupational health. These services include providing informational resources, educational materials, public presentations, and industrial hygiene and medical investigations and evaluations.

For more information, please contact:

New Jersey Department of Health
 Right to Know
 PO Box 368
 Trenton, NJ 08625-0368
 Phone: 609-984-2202
 Fax: 609-984-7407
 E-mail: rtk@doh.nj.gov
 Web address:
<http://nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/right-to-know>

The Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets are not intended to be copied and sold for commercial purposes.

GLOSSARY

ACGIH is the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. They publish guidelines called Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) for exposure to workplace chemicals.

Acute Exposure Guideline Levels (AEGs) are established by the EPA. They describe the risk to humans resulting from once-in-a-lifetime, or rare, exposure to airborne chemicals.

Boiling point is the temperature at which a substance can change its physical state from a liquid to a gas.

A **carcinogen** is a substance that causes cancer.

The **CAS number** is unique, identifying number, assigned by the Chemical Abstracts Service, to a specific chemical.

CFR is the Code of Federal Regulations, which are the regulations of the United States government.

A **combustible** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that will burn.

A **corrosive** substance is a gas, liquid or solid that causes destruction of human skin or severe corrosion of containers.

DEP is the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

DOT is the Department of Transportation, the federal agency that regulates the transportation of chemicals.

EPA is the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency responsible for regulating environmental hazards.

ERG is the Emergency Response Guidebook. It is a guide for emergency responders for transportation emergencies involving hazardous substances.

Emergency Response Planning Guideline (ERPG) values provide estimates of concentration ranges where one reasonably might anticipate observing adverse effects.

A **fetus** is an unborn human or animal.

A **flammable** substance is a solid, liquid, vapor or gas that will ignite easily and burn rapidly.

The **flash point** is the temperature at which a liquid or solid gives off vapor that can form a flammable mixture with air.

IARC is the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a scientific group.

Ionization Potential is the amount of energy needed to remove an electron from an atom or molecule. It is measured in electron volts.

IRIS is the Integrated Risk Information System database on human health effects that may result from exposure to various chemicals, maintained by federal EPA.

LEL or Lower Explosive Limit, is the lowest concentration of a combustible substance (gas or vapor) in the air capable of continuing an explosion.

mg/m³ means milligrams of a chemical in a cubic meter of air. It is a measure of concentration (weight/volume).

A **mutagen** is a substance that causes mutations. A **mutation** is a change in the genetic material in a body cell. Mutations can lead to birth defects, miscarriages, or cancer.

NFPA is the National Fire Protection Association. It classifies substances according to their fire and explosion hazard.

NIOSH is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. It tests equipment, evaluates and approves respirators, conducts studies of workplace hazards, and proposes standards to OSHA.

NTP is the National Toxicology Program which tests chemicals and reviews evidence for cancer.

OSHA is the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards.

PEOSHA is the New Jersey Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards in public workplaces.

Permeated is the movement of chemicals through protective materials.

ppm means parts of a substance per million parts of air. It is a measure of concentration by volume in air.

Protective Action Criteria (PAC) are values established by the Department of Energy and are based on AEGs and ERPGs. They are used for emergency planning of chemical release events.

A **reactive** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that releases energy under certain conditions.

STEL is a Short Term Exposure Limit which is usually a 15-minute exposure that should not be exceeded at any time during a work day.

A **teratogen** is a substance that causes birth defects by damaging the fetus.

UEL or Upper Explosive Limit is the highest concentration in air above which there is too much fuel (gas or vapor) to begin a reaction or explosion.

Vapor Density is the ratio of the weight of a given volume of one gas to the weight of another (usually *Hydrogen*), at the same temperature and pressure.

The **vapor pressure** is a force exerted by the vapor in equilibrium with the solid or liquid phase of the same substance. The higher the vapor pressure the higher concentration of the substance in air.

Common Name: **FORMALDEHYDE**

Synonyms: Formalin; Methyl Aldehyde; Methylene Oxide

CAS No: 50-00-0

Molecular Formula: CH₂O

RTK Substance No: 0946

Description: Colorless gas with a strong odor, usually found in a *Methanol* and water solution

HAZARD DATA

Hazard Rating	Firefighting	Reactivity
<p>4 - Health 4 - Fire 0 - Reactivity</p> <p>DOT#: UN 1198 (Solutions, Flammable) UN 2209 (Solutions)</p> <p>ERG Guide #: 132 Hazard Class: UN 1198 (3, Flammable) UN 2209 (8, Corrosive)</p>	<p>Formaldehyde is a FLAMMABLE GAS or COMBUSTIBLE SOLUTION.</p> <p>Use dry chemical, CO₂, water spray or alcohol-resistant foam as extinguishing agents.</p> <p>Use water spray to reduce vapors.</p> <p>POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE.</p> <p>CONTAINERS MAY EXPLODE IN FIRE.</p> <p>Use water spray to keep fire-exposed containers cool.</p>	<p>Formaldehyde reacts violently with NITROGEN OXIDES; OXIDIZING AGENTS (such as PERCHLORATES, PEROXIDES, PERMANGANATES, CHLORATES, NITRATES, CHLORINE, BROMINE and FLUORINE); mixtures of PERCHLORIC ACID and ANILINE; NITROMETHANE; MAGNESIUM CARBONATE; and HYDROGEN PEROXIDE.</p> <p>Formaldehyde reacts with PHENOL and HYDROGEN CHLORIDE to form toxic <i>Bis(Chloromethyl) Ether</i>.</p> <p>Formaldehyde is not compatible with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC); STRONG BASES (such as SODIUM HYDROXIDE and POTASSIUM HYDROXIDE); IODINE; IRON; SILVER; ISOCYANATES; AMINES; ANHYDRIDES; and LIQUID OXYGEN.</p> <p>Pure Formaldehyde may polymerize (self-react).</p>

SPILL/LEAKS

Isolation Distance:
 Spill: 50 meters (150 feet)
 Fire: 800 meters (1/2 mile)

Absorb liquids in vermiculite, dry sand, earth, or a similar material and place into sealed containers for disposal.

Stop flow of gas. If source of leak is a cylinder and the leak cannot be stopped in place, remove the leaking cylinder to a safe place in the open air, and repair leak or allow cylinder to empty.

Use only non-sparking tools and equipment, especially when opening and closing containers of **Formaldehyde**.

Keep **Formaldehyde** out of confined spaces, such as sewers, because of the possibility of an explosion.

DO NOT wash into sewer.

Formaldehyde is harmful to aquatic life at low concentrations.

PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

Odor Threshold: 0.05 to 1 ppm
Flash Point: 140° to 181°F (60° to 83°C) (solutions)
LEL: 7%
UEL: 73%
Auto Ignition Temp: 572°F (300°C) (gas); 806°F (430°C) (solution)
Vapor Density: 1.07 (air = 1) (gas)
Vapor Pressure: 760 mm Hg at 68°F (20°C)
Specific Gravity: 0.8 to 1.1 (water = 1)
Water Solubility: Soluble
Boiling Point: -3°F (-19.4°C)
Freezing Point: -134°F (-92°C)
Ionization Potential: 10.88 eV
Molecular Weight: 30

EXPOSURE LIMITS

OSHA: 0.75 ppm, 8-hr TWA; 2 ppm, 15-min STEL
NIOSH: 0.016 ppm, 10-hr TWA; 0.1 ppm, 15-min Ceiling
ACGIH: 0.3 ppm, Ceiling
IDLH: 20 ppm

The Protective Action Criteria values are:
 PAC-1 = 0.9 ppm PAC-2 = 14 ppm PAC-3 = 56 ppm

PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Gloves: Butyl, Nitrile, Neoprene and Viton (>8-hr breakthrough)
Coveralls: Tychem® BR, Responder® and TK (>8-hr breakthrough)
Respirator: SCBA

HEALTH EFFECTS

Eyes: Severe irritation, burns and possible damage
Skin: Severe irritation and burns
Inhalation: Nose, mouth, throat and lung irritation, with coughing, and severe shortness of breath (pulmonary edema)
Chronic: Cancer (nasopharynx and leukemia) in humans

FIRST AID AND DECONTAMINATION

Remove the person from exposure.
Flush eyes with large amounts of water for at least 30 minutes. Remove contact lenses if worn. Seek medical attention.
Quickly remove contaminated clothing and wash contaminated skin with large amounts of soap and water. Seek medical attention.
Begin artificial respiration if breathing has stopped and CPR if necessary.
Transfer promptly to a medical facility.
Medical observation is recommended as symptoms may be delayed.