



Methylene Chloride and You

Methylene Chloride (CL₂Cl₂ or MC) is a man-made organic solvent which does not occur naturally in the environment. However, it is one of the most common industrial solvents for oils, waxes, resins, and rubber. The solvent can be found in medical device circuit board, metal working, and pharmaceutical development laboratories

New safety standards: The health community now believes that increased precautions must be used when working with Methylene Chloride. As a result, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has lowered the permissible level of exposure for workers who deal with this chemical. The 8-hour time weighted average PEL (Permissible Exposure Limit) was formerly 500 PPM (500 parts of MC per one-million parts air). The 8-hour PEL is now 25 PPM.

Exposure: Methylene Chloride is a colorless liquid, with a sweet ether-like odor. It easily evaporates in the air, and so this is the most common place the chemical will be found. Being airborne, MC has easy access to the body, through the nose, mouth, lungs and through skin absorption. Depending upon the level of exposure, a variety of minor-to-serious health hazards can occur. Symptoms may include drowsiness, dizziness, headaches, burning of the mouth and throat; and dermatitis through de-fatting of the skin. Significant over-exposures can affect the nervous system, the respiratory system and in extreme cases, can cause death. If Methylene Chloride contacts the skin, intense burning with slight redness to the effected area can occur. In minor cases, these effects stop shortly after the exposure ends.

Take necessary precautions: When work must be completed around or with this chemical, easy responsible steps can be taken for protection. This includes safety planning and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to reduce or avoid the exposure:

- The use of an approved respirator
- Protective gloves
- Eye protection (safety glasses with side shields as a minimum/preferably goggles)
- Clothing or a garment that prohibits the chemical from reaching the skin
- Emergency eye-wash station or eye wash equipment readily available.

With the lowered PEL for Methylene Chloride, OSHA requires several safety measures when it is used in the workplace. These include exposure monitoring, specified levels of medical surveillance, and Hazard Communication/MSDS training.

Never be careless with chemicals: Chemicals at work and in the home are common today, and their use is often taken for granted. But like any tool, chemicals demand attention for good reasons. Know what chemicals you are using, the hazards involved and the PPE that is required.

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