

Skin Problems in Construction

Hazard Alert



Some construction materials can cause serious problems if they get on your skin. Some burns can even put you in the hospital. Sometimes you can get a skin infection that can risk your life. Or some of the materials can go through your skin and make you sick.

Sometimes you can become *allergic* to a material at work and get skin problems. They can be so bad that you cannot work — even with tiny amounts of the material. In that case, you may have to change careers.

Some materials that can hurt your skin

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| Wet cement | Epoxy resins |
| Some cement dusts | Alcohols |
| Lime | Toluene |
| Metalworking fluids | Turpentine |
| Some paints | Xylene |
| Adhesives | |

These materials can cause red, itchy, scaly skin or painful burns, ulcers, and rashes like acne — all known as contact dermatitis. Also, pitch and coal tar can cause skin cancer.

What You Can Do

For all these materials, use mild, non-abrasive soaps. Try not to use a solvent to clean your hands. (Alcohol, mineral spirits, turpentine, and limonene are solvents.) Solvents can irritate your skin and make you very sick. Try mineral oil or vegetable oil with soap and water.

Some soaps can hurt your skin, if you work with **caustics** like lime or wet cement. (Soaps that remove caustics and do not cause more damage are *pH neutral*.)

You can use these *bar* soaps.

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|--------|-------------|
| Caress | Oil of Olay |
| Dove | |

You can use these *liquid* soaps

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|---------------|-------------|
| Aloe Vera 80 | Lever 2000 |
| Cetaphil | Neutrogena |
| Dial | Rainbath |
| Dove | Noxema |
| Gillette Wash | Oil of Olay |
| Ivory | pHisoderm |
| Jergens | Softsoap |

After you finish work, wash with soap, rinse with water, and dry your hands with clean cloth or paper. After that you can use mineral oil, petroleum jelly (vaseline), or oil-based lotions. Try not to use lotions that have lanolin, limonene (citrus solvent), or perfumes. *(Please turn the page.)*

If you use work gloves, make sure your hands and the insides of the gloves are clean and

dry when you put on the gloves. If your hands have any of the harsh materials on them when you put on gloves, you can make your skin problems worse. (Don't let the materials get inside your boots, either.)

Make sure you use the right gloves for the job. Some gloves will not protect you from some of the materials. Or the gloves may not protect you for a whole work shift.

If you have a skin problem that won't go away, see a doctor. Tell your doctor what materials you use at work.

Put on sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of **15** or more before you work outdoors, even on cloudy days. Do this even if you have dark skin. **Make sure your hands and skin are clean before** you put on sunscreen.

Wear a long-sleeved shirt. It can help protect your skin from the harmful materials and from sunburn. Try not to get your clothes wet with cement or other harsh materials. (Pitch, asphalt, and coal tar can be especially harmful if you are in the sun. When you work with hot asphalt, do not wear synthetic materials like polyesters or nylon; they melt when they touch hot asphalt.)

When you get home, **do not wash your work clothes with other clothes.** You want to keep any harmful materials from work off your and your family's clothes.

For more information, call your local union, joint apprenticeship training fund, the Center to Protect Workers' Rights (CPWR) (301-578-8500 or www.cpwr.com), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (1-800-35-NIOSH or www.cdc.gov/niosh), or OSHA (1-800-321-OSHA or www.osha.gov). Or check the website www.elcosh.org.

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