

Health and Safety Glossary of Terms

ACQUIRED IMMUNITY: is gaining the ability to prevent a particular infection. Immunity can be acquired by receiving a vaccination, or getting a disease once and then the body's immune system prevents further infection to that disease.

BOILING POINT: the temperature at which a liquid will boil or change to a gas. The lower the boiling point, the faster it will evaporate into the air.

CARCINOGEN: an agent that causes cancer.

CAS NUMBER: the identification number given to a chemical by the Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS).

CEILING LIMIT: the maximum level of exposure to a toxic agent that is allowed at any time.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE: An infectious disease that can be spread from person to person or animals to humans.

CONFINED SPACE: an area with a small opening that is large enough for someone to enter and work.

DECIBEL (DB): the unit that is used to measure sound.

ERGONOMICS: the practice of changing the work environment to meet the physical and other needs of workers.

FLASH POINT: the lowest temperature at which a chemical vapor will light on fire.

FUMES: are solid particles that are formed when a substance that has evaporated, condenses in cool air. Fumes often result as molten metals cool.

GASES: are fluids that have no shape and expand to fill the shape of the space in which they are contained.

HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS: a term that refers to using the most effective means possible to control hazards. The order of effectiveness to control hazards is: using a different product or process (substitution), isolating the hazard, removing the hazard with equipment (engineering controls), using ergonomics, changing the way work is organized (administrative controls), using personal protective equipment.

HIGH EFFICIENCY PARTICULATE AIR (HEPA): a filter for respirators, vacuum cleaners, and other products that can trap extremely small particles, fibers and germs. HEPA filters are used to prevent breathing asbestos, lead, tuberculosis.

IMMINENT DANGER: a situation that poses an immediate threat of death or serious injury or illness.

IONIZING RADIATION: a form of physical energy that moves in wave-like motion and includes alpha, beta and X-rays. Ionizing radiation is powerful enough to change an atom's structure and can kill living cells and cause cancer, sterility and birth defects.

MISTS: droplets of a liquid that are suspended in the air.

MATERIAL SAFETY DATA SHEET (MSDS): a form containing information on a chemical. Employers must have an MSDS available to workers for each hazardous chemical used in the workplace under OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200).

MUTAGEN: an agent that can change the genetic make-up of a cell. Mutagens can cause cancer, miscarriages and unwanted inherited traits.

NON-IONIZING RADIATION: physical energy that moves in wave-like motion that does not change the structure of atoms.

PANICULATE: a particle of a solid or liquid that is suspended in the air.

PARTS PER MILLION (PPM): a unit that is used to measure the concentration of a substance in a given area. Chemical exposures are usually given as the number of molecules of a chemical within a million molecules of air. One part per million is equal to one drop of water in 18 gallons of water, or one inch in 16 miles.

PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LIMIT (PEL): the legal level of exposure to a substance that is allowed by OSHA.

REACTIVITY: refers to how easily a substance will undergo a chemical change that can have a dangerous effect such as an explosion.

RECOMMENDED EXPOSURE LIMIT (REL): a level of exposure that is set by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

REPRODUCTIVE EFFECTS: exposure of men or women to agents that results in infertility, impotence, loss of sex drive and birth defects.

SENSITIZER: an agent that can cause an allergic reaction. Common sensitizers include formaldehyde and latex.

SHORT-TERM EXPOSURE LIMIT (STEL): the level of exposure that is allowed for a short period of time, up to 15 minutes. Certain OSHA standards have STELS.

SPECIFIC GRAVITY: the weight of a substance compared to air or water. A gas that is heavier than air (more than 1.0) will sink.

SUSCEPTIBLE HOST: a person or animal that can be infected by a particular communicable disease.

TERATOGEN: a substance that causes birth defects.

THRESHOLD LIMIT VALUE (TLV): a level of exposure set by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists.

TIME-WEIGHTED AVERAGE (TWA): the level of exposure that is allowed based upon a full work shift of 8 hours.

VAPOR DENSITY: is the weight of a vapor compared to air. A vapor that is lighter than air (less than 1.0) will rise into the air.