TOOLBOX TALK AWARENESS PACKAGES

HAZ-FMD · Formaldehyde Awareness

Product Overview

Audience: Laboratory, pathology, mortuary, funeral home and woodworking staff, and anyone who uses formalin or machines MDF and resin-bonded boards · Duration: 20–30 minutes

Version 1.0 · 22 November 2026

For laboratory, mortuary, funeral and woodworking staff: where formaldehyde is found, from formalin to MDF and resins, irritation and the cancer risk, ventilation, safe handling and spills.

Formaldehyde is a chemical with a strong, sharp smell. At work it is found in formalin, used to preserve specimens in laboratories, pathology, hospitals and schools; in embalming fluids in mortuaries and funeral homes; and in the resins and glues used to make MDF, particleboard and plywood, which can release it when boards are cut, sanded or heated. Breathing it irritates the eyes, nose and throat, and it can irritate the skin. It can cause skin and breathing allergies, and it is a known cause of cancer.

This talk covers where formaldehyde is found, how it gets in, what it can do to health, and the controls: prefilled containers and closed systems, local extraction and downdraft tables, dust extraction when machining boards, lids kept on, the gloves and eye protection the SDS requires, and spill kits. It covers what to do after a spill or splash, and reporting symptoms. It is awareness, not training in embalming, laboratory procedures or respirator fitting.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session participants will be able to:

- Name where formaldehyde is found at work, from formalin and embalming fluids to MDF, particleboard and resins
- Explain how formaldehyde gets in: breathing vapour and dust, and through skin and eye contact
- Explain what formaldehyde can do to health: irritation, allergies, and that it is a known cause of cancer
- Explain the controls, starting with prefilled containers, closed systems and local extraction
- Handle formalin safely: lids on, the right gloves and eye protection, and a spill kit ready
- Respond to a spill or splash, report symptoms such as sore eyes or a burning nose, and report problems

What it covers

Module	Covers
Why it matters	Where formaldehyde is found; How it gets in; What it does to health
Controls that work	Prefilled and closed systems; Extraction and ventilation; Gloves, eyes and spill kits
Your part	Lids on, extraction on; Spills and splashes; Report it

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Activities

- Where is the formaldehyde: workers find the risk in four jobs, from cutting tissue samples at a bench to sanding MDF in a joinery, and decide on a safer way
- What would you do: workers decide what to do in four situations, from a dropped bottle of formalin to sore eyes every time the extraction is turned off

What is in the package

Item	File
Editable PowerPoint presentation with speaker notes, plus PDF	02_TRAINING_PRESENTATION/Training Presentation.pptx and .pdf
Facilitator guide with a running sheet, discussion prompts and model answers	03_FACILITATOR_GUIDE/Facilitator Guide.docx and .pdf
Participant handout with the key points to take away	04_PARTICIPANT_HANDOUT/Participant Handout.docx and .pdf
Attendance record form, to capture who attended, when, and who facilitated	06_RECORDS/Attendance Record.docx and .pdf
Excel attendance register	06_RECORDS/Attendance Register.xlsx
Multiple-choice theory assessment, to record understanding if your business wants to	05_ASSESSMENT/Theory Assessment.docx and .pdf
Answer key for the assessment	05_ASSESSMENT/Assessment Answer Key.docx and .pdf
Certificate template	06_RECORDS/Certificate Template.docx
Start here: Read Me First, Product Overview, Permitted Use Terms, Version Information	01_START_HERE/ (four PDFs)

What you need to deliver it

- A facilitator such as a supervisor, leading hand or WHS adviser who has read the facilitator guide and knows your site's arrangements for the topic
- A screen or projector, or printed slides or handouts: it works in a crib room, site office or on a video call
- Your own site procedures for the topic, to point to during the session

Questions

Does it cover embalming and laboratory procedures? Only the formaldehyde part. Embalming, tissue handling and other laboratory work need their own procedures and training. The talk covers where formaldehyde is found in that work, why it matters and the controls every worker should expect to see. It quotes no exposure limits or concentrations: check them in the SDS and with your regulator.

Can we add our own site procedures and photos? Yes. The slides, handout and guide are editable, and the facilitator guide marks the places to add your own procedures, contacts and photos of your workplace.

Do we have to use the assessment? No. It is there if your business wants a record that each worker understood the key points. The attendance record on its own shows who attended and when.

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TOOLBOX TALK

Formaldehyde Awareness

Formalin, embalming and boards: where formaldehyde is found, and how to keep it contained

20–30 minutes · Laboratory, pathology, mortuary, funeral home and woodworking staff, and anyone who uses formalin or machines MDF and resin-bonded boards

[Company name] · [Date] · [Facilitator name]

FMD

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What this talk is, and is not

This talk covers

- ✓ Where formaldehyde is found
- ✓ How it gets in, and what it does
- ✓ The controls for vapour, dust and skin
- ✓ Spills, splashes and symptoms

This talk is not

- ✕ Embalming or laboratory training
- ✕ Large spill clean-up training
- ✕ Respirator fit training
- ✕ Our procedure: **[Our formaldehyde procedure]**

Awareness only. Embalming, laboratory procedures, spill response and respirator use need their own procedures and training.

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Where formaldehyde is found

Formaldehyde is used to preserve tissue and to bond boards.

- Formalin in laboratories, pathology and hospitals
- Specimens in schools and universities
- Embalming in mortuaries and funeral homes
- MDF, particleboard and plywood, cut or sanded
- Some resins, glues, coatings and textiles

A composite example

- A technician pours formalin into specimen pots on an open bench. The extraction is switched off because it is noisy.
- By lunch her eyes are sore and her nose is burning.

If you can smell it, it is in the air you breathe.

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Duties under health and safety laws

The business must

- Identify where formaldehyde is used
- Contain and extract it at the source
- Provide the right PPE and spill kits
- Provide eyewash and first aid

You must

- Follow the procedure
- Use the extraction and keep lids on
- Wear the gloves and eye protection
- Report spills, faults and symptoms

Most health and safety laws give these duties. Check the law where you work (in Australia, WHS or OHS laws).

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The order of controls for formaldehyde

1 **Elimination** A formaldehyde-free method or product, where one works

2 **Substitution** Prefilled specimen pots; low-emission boards

3 **Isolation** Closed systems and sealed containers; lids kept on

4 **Engineering** Fume cupboards, downdraft tables, dust extraction

5 **Administrative** Procedures, spill kits, signs, air monitoring

6 **PPE** The gloves, eye protection and respirator the SDS requires

HIGHER ORDER

Higher order controls remove or control the hazard at the source, or put a barrier between people and the hazard.

LOWER ORDER

Lower order controls rely on people to do a thing or wear a thing, every time, tired, distracted or rushed.

Behaviours are not on the hierarchy, but behaviours and culture decide whether every control on it actually works.

Extraction only works when it is switched on.

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TOOLBOX TALK · HAZ-FMD

Formaldehyde Awareness

Participant handout · keep this

Formaldehyde irritates, causes allergies and can cause cancer. Keep it contained and extracted. Keep this page.

The order of controls

1. A formaldehyde-free method, where one works
2. Prefilled pots; low-emission boards
3. Closed systems; lids kept on
4. Fume cupboards, downdraft tables, extraction
5. Procedures, spill kits, monitoring
6. The gloves and eye protection the SDS requires

What it can do

- Sore eyes, burning nose, cough, rashes
- Allergies; a known cause of cancer

Never

- Pour formalin with the extraction off
- Rely on the smell

Before you start

- ☐ Does this job involve formalin, embalming fluid or resin-bonded board?
- ☐ Is the extraction or downdraft table on and working?
- ☐ Are containers prefilled or closed, with lids on?
- ☐ Am I wearing the gloves and eye protection the SDS requires?
- ☐ Do I know where the spill kit and eyewash are?

Spill or splash

- Spill: warn others, move away, spill kit
- Splash: rinse; eyes to the eyewash

Who and where

- **[Our formaldehyde procedure]**
- **[Spill kit and eyewash location]**
- **[Who to report to here]**

Keep the lid on and the extraction running. Sore eyes or a burning nose mean the controls need checking.

This is awareness training. It is not a licence, a ticket, a permit or a competency. It is not embalming, laboratory, spill response or respirator fit training.

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