



Saving your skin

WHEN ORGANISATIONS THINK ABOUT PERSONAL PROTECTION, THEY TEND TO THINK ABOUT ITEMS SUCH AS SAFETY GEAR FOR EMPLOYEES, OR MACHINE GUARDS FOR EQUIPMENT. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT AREA WHERE EMPLOYEE PROTECTION IS NOT ONLY IMPORTANT, BUT OBLIGED BY LAW.

Working with heavy rocks, massive earth-moving equipment, explosives and the like, it's only natural – and necessary – to consider the risks and take preventative action. However there's just as much risk to employee health and well-being from much less obvious sources.

The Health and Safety Executive estimates that around 70% of occupational skin disease cases it has reported to it are diagnosed as contact dermatitis. That's not just a bit of rough skin or a few blisters, but a serious condition that can lead to employee absence, lost productivity, reduced employee efficiency and poor staff morale – and it's a condition which employers have a legal duty of care to try to prevent.



Quarrying and mining arguably offer more risk of contact dermatitis than some other industries. For instance, limestone quarrying creates a real risk if wet lime comes into contact with skin, and the large amount of machinery in operation in these industries means that the likelihood of workers coming into frequent and repeated contact with diesel, lubricating oil or grease, and penetrating or coolant oil is high. And it's this kind of repeated or sustained contact which can lead to the development of contact dermatitis.

However, it is not only workers obviously requiring personal protection equipment whose skin safety should be considered. As Phil Spark, Marketing Director of Deb – the world's leading away from home skin care system company – explains, "It is important to look at the needs of every employee in the workplace. Organisations should work with companies who are experts in skin care to provide a systemised skin care safety solution, along with providing support materials to create a communications campaign to educate employees on the importance of hand hygiene."

Guidelines from the Health and Safety Executive – 'Directors' Responsibility for Health and Safety' – highlight that employers are legally obliged to provide a safe working environment and carry out regular safety assessments. This includes assessing the risks that could cause dermatitis, and to take necessary steps to prevent it, such as reducing contact with harmful materials, choosing the right protective equipment and skin care products, and checking for early signs of skin disease.

Of course, whatever steps the employer takes, the employee also has a duty to comply with the preventative actions – whether that's using a particular piece of equipment to prevent skin contact, or following hand hygiene procedures, for example. That's why it's important to educate employees in the correct procedures, as well as providing a skin safety solution.

Working with a company such as Deb and ERIKS can help employers to provide a simple yet cost-effective solution to help all employees combat dermatitis in the workplace, and save their skin.

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