TOOLBOX TALK BRIEFKIT

COSHH Awareness

A ready-to-deliver toolbox talk for foremen and supervisors. 8-10 minute spoken script plus briefing register for operative sign-in.

REFERENCE	TBT-COSHH-AWARENESS-001	**DURATION**	8-10 minutes
DATE		**SITE**	
TRAINER (PRINT)		**SIGNATURE**	

1 Why it matters

Hazardous substances harm far more construction workers over time than accidents do, but slowly, so people don't take it as seriously. Dusts and fumes cause lung disease and cancers that show up years later, chemicals burn and sensitise skin, and some cause asthma you never recover from. The damage is usually done long before you feel anything, which is exactly why we control it now rather than wait.

2 PPE required for this task

- RPE suited to the substance and face-fit tested
- Chemical-resistant gloves appropriate to the substance
- Eye protection where there's a splash or dust risk
- Coveralls or protective clothing where the sheet calls for it

3 What to say

Spoken script for the supervisor. Read or paraphrase, in order.

1 What COSHH actually covers

It's not just labelled chemicals. It's dusts like silica, wood and cement, fumes from welding and exhausts, vapours and solvents, glues and resins, fuels, paints, cleaning products, even some biological stuff. If it can harm your health and it isn't asbestos, lead or radiation, which have their own rules, COSHH covers it. On a normal site you're surrounded by the stuff, you just stop noticing it.

2 How it gets into you

Four ways. Breathing it in, that's the big one, dust and fumes. Through the skin or eyes, solvents, cement, resins. Swallowing it, usually hand to mouth from eating with dirty hands. And injection, which is rare but happens with high-pressure gear. Most of the harm is breathing and skin, and that's exactly why hygiene and the right mask matter so much.

3 Read the label and the safety data sheet

Every hazardous product has a safety data sheet and hazard pictograms on the label, those orange and red diamonds. Before anything new gets used, someone should have done a COSHH assessment for it, and you should know what it is and how to use it safely. If there's no assessment and you don't know what it is, don't just crack on, come and ask. Guessing with chemicals is how people get hurt.

4 Controls come in an order, and PPE is last

First choice is not using the harmful stuff at all, or swapping it for something safer. Then engineering controls, extraction, water suppression on dust, decent ventilation. Masks and gloves are the last line, not the first, because they only work if they're the right type, worn properly and looked after. A flimsy paper nuisance mask does next to nothing against fine dust, so don't kid yourself it's protecting you.

5 RPE has to fit and be the right type

The mask has to match the hazard, a dust mask is useless against solvent vapour, you need the right filter for the job. And a tight-fitting mask only works if it seals to your face, which means it's been face-fit tested and you're clean shaven where it seals. A beard and a tight mask don't mix, the gap just lets the bad stuff straight in past the filter, so you might as well not bother.

6 Labelling, storage, and never decant into a drinks bottle

Keep substances in their proper labelled containers, stored the way the sheet says, away from heat or anything they react with. Never decant a chemical into an unlabelled bottle or, the classic one, an old drinks bottle, because that's exactly how someone ends up swallowing something that burns their throat. If a container isn't labelled, you don't know what's in it, so it doesn't get used.

7 Hygiene and knowing the early signs

Wash your hands before you eat, drink or smoke, and don't eat in the work area. Learn the early warnings, a cough that won't shift, skin rashes and cracking, headaches, getting short of breath, and report them early. Occupational asthma and dermatitis can finish your career, and the sooner it's caught the better the outcome. If you feel rough after using something, tell me, don't just push through it.

4 Common mistakes to call out

Using a product with no COSHH assessment and no idea what's in it

Treating dust and fumes as harmless because the harm is years away

Relying on a flimsy nuisance mask instead of the right RPE

Wearing a tight-fitting mask over a beard so it can't seal

Reaching for PPE first instead of extraction, suppression or substitution

Decanting chemicals into unlabelled or old drinks bottles

Eating, drinking or smoking with contaminated hands or in the work area

Mixing chemicals without knowing how they react together

Ignoring early symptoms like a persistent cough, rash or breathlessness

Storing substances near heat, fuel or things they react with

5 Watch on site this week

What the supervisor should be actively spotting on walk-arounds.

Products in use with no safety data sheet or COSHH assessment available

Dust clouds from cutting or sweeping with no suppression or extraction

Paper nuisance masks being used against fine dust or fumes

Tight-fitting RPE worn over beards or heavy stubble

Unlabelled containers or chemicals in old drinks bottles

Chemicals stored near heat, fuel or incompatible substances

People eating or drinking in the work area with dirty hands

No washing facilities near dusty or chemical work

Spray painting or foam work (isocyanates) with inadequate RPE

Operatives shrugging off coughs, rashes or headaches as just the job

6 Confirm the team understood

Ask one or two of these at the end of the talk.

1. Name three things on site that COSHH covers. (Any of: silica, wood or cement dust, welding or exhaust fumes, solvents, glues and resins, fuels, paints, cleaning chemicals.)
2. What's the main way hazardous substances get into you on site? (Breathing them in, with skin contact a close second.)
3. Why is PPE the last control, not the first? (It only protects if it's the right type, fitted and maintained, so removing or reducing the hazard is always better.)
4. Why must someone wearing a tight-fitting mask be clean shaven where it seals? (Stubble breaks the seal and lets dust or fume straight past the filter.)

Briefing register: COSHH Awareness

All operatives who attend this toolbox talk must sign below. Their signature confirms they have heard and understood the briefing.

Briefing delivered by:

Name (print):		**Date:**	
Signature:		**Time:**	
Site:			

Attendees. I confirm I have heard and understood the briefing detailed above:

#	Name (print)	Company / Role	Signature	Date	CSCS / Ticket No.
1					
2					
3					
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Keep this register in the site Safety File. Additional sheets may be appended if more than 12 operatives are briefed.