



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Glutaraldehyde

1. Introduction

The Australia Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) (ANMF (Vic Branch)) recognises that some nurses and midwives working in healthcare environments and other industries may use and be exposed to glutaraldehyde during the course of their work, creating a risk to their health and safety.

Glutaraldehyde is a chemical disinfectant, previously widely used in healthcare environments to disinfect medical and surgical equipment not suitable for high temperature sterilisation.

Glutaraldehyde is classified as potentially causing sensitisation by inhalation and skin contact, and is also designated as toxic by inhalation and if swallowed, and potentially causing burns.¹

Glutaraldehyde is also known as glutaral or 1,5-Pentanedial² or Glutaric Dialdehyde, amongst others.

2. Objective

The ANMF (Vic Branch) objective is to support the elimination and management of risks to the health and safety of Victorian nurses and midwives related to the use of glutaraldehyde as a disinfectant, during the course of their work.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all ANMF (Vic Branch) members, all nurses and midwives eligible for ANMF (Vic Branch) membership and all uses of glutaraldehyde in Victorian healthcare environments and other industries.

4. Definitions

Disinfection: to clean (something) especially by using a chemical substance that destroys harmful microorganisms.

Sterilisation: the act of making an organism barren or infertile (unable to reproduce).

Sensitisation: sensitivity to stimulation.

¹ SafeWork Australia, Hazardous Substances Information System, [http://hsis.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/HazardousSubstance/Details?hazardous SubstanceID=606](http://hsis.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/HazardousSubstance/Details?hazardous%20SubstanceID=606) , accessed 2 September 2013

² SafeWork Australia, Hazardous Substances Information System, [http://hsis.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/HazardousSubstance/Details?hazardous SubstanceID=606](http://hsis.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/HazardousSubstance/Details?hazardous%20SubstanceID=606) , accessed 25 August 2016

5. Policy

- 5.1 Under the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, all employees have a right to perform their work in an environment that is safe and without risks to health, from exposure to glutaraldehyde.
- 5.2 The use of glutaraldehyde should be eliminated from all Victorian healthcare environments.
- 5.3 Where not reasonably practicable to eliminate glutaraldehyde, then as far as reasonably practicable, the use of and exposure to glutaraldehyde is reduced by applying appropriate controls. Controls may include automated enclosed systems and atmospheric monitoring.

NB: In these situations, the guidelines as set out by WorkSafe Victoria in 'A Guide to Safe Use of Glutaraldehyde: For cold disinfection of medical instruments'³ should be adhered to. Any workers using glutaraldehyde should be trained in safe work procedures and provided with appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE).

6. Key elements

6.1 Employers

ANMF (Vic Branch) requires employers to eliminate and if not reasonably practicable to eliminate, reduce the risk of exposure to glutaraldehyde through:

- Obtaining the manufacturer's or importers Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and making it available to all workers
- Implement risk management processes to identify, assess and control glutaraldehyde exposure hazards and risks
- Implement an appropriate procurement process for purchasing and sourcing products that do not contain glutaraldehyde
- Integration of glutaraldehyde exposure prevention into workplace OHS arrangements – including OHS representation, consultation and issue resolution
- Communication to all staff to raise awareness about exposure to glutaraldehyde and involvement of staff in the prevention and management strategies implemented
- Provision of training to all staff to educate them about exposure to glutaraldehyde, including symptoms, preventative and management strategies
- Action plans which outline management responsibilities, timelines and resource allocation for glutaraldehyde exposure prevention at workplace and organisation levels
- Provision of knowledge and skills in managing issues around exposure to glutaraldehyde for managers and supervisors

6.2 Consultation

6.2.1 The participation of and consultation with staff and their representatives, including the ANMF (Vic Branch) and Health & Safety Representatives (HSRs), is critical to the effective implementation of relevant and sustainable policies and procedures and risk control strategies for preventing and managing the risks associated with exposure to glutaraldehyde.

6.2.2 Appropriate consultative and representative structures (including HSRs and OHS Committees) are necessary so as to encourage staff to report injuries/illness and unresolved issues related to exposure to glutaraldehyde at the workplace to both management and / or HSRs.

6.3 Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)

The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports involvement of HSRs in prevention of exposure to glutaraldehyde through:

³ WorkSafe Victoria, December 2007, [A Guide to Safe Use of Glutaraldehyde for Cold Disinfection of Medical Instruments](#)

- Encouraging staff to report all incidents of exposure to glutaraldehyde
- Representation and consultation with employers
- Health and Safety Committee (HSC) formulation and participation
- Review and dissemination of plans for prevention of exposure to glutaraldehyde
- Workplace OHS issue resolution
- Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs) or requests for WorkSafe Inspectors to attend the workplace if employers have not acted to resolve glutaraldehyde exposure issues

6.4 ANMF (Vic Branch) members

The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports involvement of members in the prevention of work-related fatigue through:

- Reporting fatigue issues to management and HSRs
- Consultation through HSRs on work-related fatigue control measures

6.5 Health effects

Exposure to glutaraldehyde causes short term adverse health effects, dependent upon concentration, including⁴:

- Severe skin burns
- Eye, nose and throat irritation with potential severe, irreversible eye injury, discharge from the nose, possibly bleeding from the nose, coughing, chest discomfort and tightness, difficulty with breathing
- Eye damage
- Headache
- Nausea
- Asthma symptoms or breathing difficulties

Some substances are known to cause sensitisation and create greater risks to sensitised workers. Sensitised workers may also react to levels of the substance below the exposure standard and should not be further exposed to the substance.⁵

6.6 Patient to patient infection

Whilst glutaraldehyde is used as a disinfectant, it does not sterilise, and only disinfects provided that instruments are scrupulously cleaned prior to soaking. This presents a risk of transmission of infection from patient to patient resulting in unnecessary pain and suffering.

6.7 Alternatives to glutaraldehyde disinfection

Other methods of disinfection are available.

Sterilisation is readily available for use with flexible and heat sensitive instrumentation. These alternatives use non-toxic chemicals that do not present the same risk to those workers who may be involved in the cleaning and soaking of such instruments.

7. Relevant legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007

⁴ SafeWork Australia, HCIS

⁵ SafeWork Australia, 18 April 2013, Workplace Exposure Standards For Airborne Contaminants, Page 7

8. Relevant guidance

- ANMF (Vic Branch) Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- Workplace Exposure Standards For Airborne Contaminants, SafeWork Australia
- Hazardous Substances Information System, SafeWork Australia
- Victorian Advisory Committee on Infection Control, Review Sub-Committee Report, Infection Control Taskforce Glutaraldehyde Recommendation Number 11, 1998
- *A Guide to Safe Use of Glutaraldehyde for Cold Disinfection of Medical Instruments*, WorkSafe Victoria
- Work Health and Safety: Better Practice Procedures – NSW Government, 2013 Glutaraldehyde – CDC Workplace Health and Safety Topics