

18th November 2002

Health & Safety Fibre Glass Fire Blankets

The following information relates to the Fire blankets we supply to you. It is based on information provided to us by the fibre glass manufacturers.

A Glass Fibre Detail

The fire blankets are manufactured from woven fibre glass containing continuous filament glass fibres manufactured from E glass. Filament diameters are in the range 9 micron to 15 micron. To improve production handling and give qualities to end users the filaments are often treated with small amounts of various "finishes" that act as dressings, coupling agents or binders.

B Noticeable Effects of working with Glass Fibre Products

With certain people in certain conditions working with glass fibre products can lead to irritation of the skin, irritation of the eyes and irritation of the upper respiratory tract.

1. Irritation of the Skin

First time exposure to glass fibre gives rise to skin irritation in some people. Those affected in this way experience reddening and itching of the skin. These effects are often temporary and will subside if the person remains in contact with the material over a period of time. The most susceptible people are those who have suffered from skin complaints in the past. Generally, such people should not come into contact with glass fibre.

2. Irritation of the Eyes

If glass fibre enters the eye the effect will be irritation, as with entry of any other foreign body (see Handling & Personal Care).

3. Irritation to Upper Respiratory Tract

Exceptionally high concentration of airborne glass fibre dust may give rise to irritation of the upper respiratory tract. Usually the irritation is transitory and leaves no permanent disability. The degree of irritation may also be related to the presence of uncured resin binders on the glass.

The inhalation of glass fibre, unlike asbestos, does not produce fibrotic lung disease. There is no evidence of any incidence of lung cancer and no case of mesothelioma has been recorded in man which relates to exposure to glass fibres.

4. For additional information see the Health & Safety Commission Discussion Document "Man-Made Mineral Fibres".

C Dust Control

For advice concerning control of airborne dust containing glass fibre, see "Man Made Mineral Fibres" - the Health & Safety Commission discussion document mentioned above. This document recommends control limits of 5mg/m³ and f fibre/millilitre (a fibre is defined as having a diameter less than 3 micron, a length greater than 5 micron and a length to breadth ratio of not less than 3.1)

In general the dust does not have any significant biological effect but could interfere with comfort and welfare.

D Handling and Personal Care

Most people working with glass fibre products find it helps to wear loose clothing - particularly at the neck and wrists. Barrier creams may be used but it all depends on personal choice. Their real value is to give protection against resin and other chemicals.

Irritation can be lessened by rinsing the skin under cold running water. This prevents fibres being rubbed into the skin when soap is applied.

Where there is any possibility of fibres or dust entering the eye suitable eye protection should be worn.

E Current Research

Although there is no evidence of humans contracting cancers by exposure to glass fibre there is continuous research in Europe by a Joint European Medical Research Board (JEMRB). This organisation is making substantial contributions independent international medical research. It is supporting the Medical Council in Britain so that the MRC Pneumoconiosis Unit can extend its work in this field, and the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh, which is conducting occupational hygiene investigations. These organisations are independent bodies.