

# Preventing Contact Dermatitis when using Drywall Finishing Compounds, Setting Compounds, Paints and Spray Textures

## Technical Data Sheet

### What is contact dermatitis?

Skin problems that develop at work are called occupational skin conditions. The most frequently reported workplace skin condition is contact dermatitis. There are a large number of substances, found in a wide range of workplaces, which can cause skin conditions. Some substances are irritants and cause irritant contact dermatitis, while others may be sensitizers and will cause allergic contact dermatitis.

Contact dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin causing redness and soreness. The inflammation is usually confined to the area of the skin that comes in contact with the irritating or sensitizing substance. You can get contact dermatitis from working with dusts, paints, glues, detergents, cleaners, cement, solvents, some metals, acids and alkaline substances, many other chemicals and/or in wet conditions.

Signs of contact dermatitis can take many forms and may include:

- redness of the skin
- swelling
- itching and pain
- blisters, scales or crusts
- dryness of the skin
- thickening of the skin
- cracking and bleeding
- in severe cases, severe blistering and open sores.

Workers who use joint compounds, finishing compounds and spray textures may develop irritant contact dermatitis from repeated or prolonged contact with water, cement and dusts. Workers may also develop allergic contact dermatitis from exposure to finishes containing latex. Irritant contact dermatitis is more common than allergic contact dermatitis.

### What causes workplace contact dermatitis?

Irritant contact dermatitis happens when a substance causes direct damage to the skin. Damage can be:

- acute (immediate) after contact with a high concentration of a severe irritant that causes a reaction like a burn
- chronic (persists), or delayed (when it forms after months or years of contact with an irritant).

An allergic contact dermatitis can occur in two ways:

- an immediate hive (blister) reaction on the skin
- a rash called allergic contact dermatitis which usually develops 24 to 96 hours after contact.

How severe the irritation is depends on:

- how long and how often a worker has contact with the substance
- what part of the body is exposed to the irritant or allergen; irritation is greater where the skin is thinner, such as on the face and upper back; irritation is greater on the face, arms and hands (exposed skin), if the substance is airborne
- skin sensitivity, rashes, cuts, scratches or scrapes prior to exposure to the irritant or allergen
- fairness of the skin
- whether the temperature and humidity in the workplace causes a worker to sweat or makes his/her skin dry out or chap
- other factors, such as age and family history of allergic dermatitis.

The skin condition usually heals a few weeks after exposure ends.

Contact dermatitis is not infectious, so it cannot be passed from one person to another.

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### How should it be treated?

If you develop contact dermatitis there are a number of things you can do to prevent it from getting worse. Wear protective gloves, clothing, barrier creams and masks to prevent the irritant from contacting the skin. Protect the skin from further irritation by avoiding excessive sunlight, wind, wet conditions and extreme temperatures.

If allergic contact dermatitis is suspected, then workers should avoid all further exposure to the allergen. A doctor can diagnose allergic contact dermatitis by using a patch test and your doctor will help you decide how to best treat your dermatitis.

Most workers who have contact dermatitis can return to work. It will depend on:

- which type of contact dermatitis (irritant or allergic)
- how severe it is
- how it is treated.

### How can it be prevented?

Occupational contact dermatitis can be avoided by a few simple measures. Hand washing is very important in preventing dermatitis, however, workers should be aware that excessive hand washing with soap and detergents can also damage the skin and be a cause of dermatitis.

Wear the proper protective clothing and gloves to prevent substances from contacting the skin. It is important to select appropriate protective clothing and gloves, suitable for the type of work to be performed. Consult the clothing and glove manufacturer's specifications for guidance on the selection of appropriate protective clothing.

Barrier creams are sometimes used as substitutes for protective clothing. These do not provide as much protection as protective clothing. Barrier creams should be properly selected for specific purposes to ensure that they offer protection for the type of chemical being used and that they will not contribute to skin irritation problems.

Other measures to prevent skin contact include:

- Using ventilation systems which remove potentially harmful airborne substances.
- Maintaining good housekeeping; including proper storage of substances, disposal of wastes, clean-up of spills and keeping work equipment clean.
- Ensuring there are convenient washing facilities.

Using good hygiene practices to avoid exposure of the skin to irritant and allergenic substances is vitally important to preventing contact dermatitis.

A Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) is available for all CertainTeed joint compounds, finishing compounds and spray finishes. Specific information on the ingredients of the product, the potential hazards, and safe handling procedures are listed on the MSDS. MSDSs may be obtained from the web site at [www.CertainTeed.com](http://www.CertainTeed.com).

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