

Occupational Health Guideline for Phosphorus (Yellow)

INTRODUCTION

This guideline is intended as a source of information for employees, employers, physicians, industrial hygienists, and other occupational health professionals who may have a need for such information. It does not attempt to present all data; rather, it presents pertinent information and data in summary form.

SUBSTANCE IDENTIFICATION

- Formula: P_4
- Synonyms: White phosphorus; WP; phosphorus, elemental, white
- Appearance and odor: White to yellow, soft, waxy solid which gives off acrid fumes on exposure to air.

PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LIMIT (PEL)

The current OSHA standard for phosphorus (yellow) is 0.1 milligram of phosphorus (yellow) per cubic meter of air (mg/m^3) averaged over an eight-hour work shift.

HEALTH HAZARD INFORMATION

• Routes of exposure

Phosphorus (yellow) can affect the body if it is inhaled or if it comes in contact with the eyes or skin. It can also affect the body if it is swallowed.

• Effects of overexposure

1. Short-term Exposure: The vapors of burning phosphorus (yellow) are irritating to the nose, throat, and lungs. Severe breathing difficulties may occur. The onset of these difficulties may be delayed for several hours. Phosphorus (yellow) on contact with the skin may ignite and produce severe skin burns with blistering. Phosphorus (yellow) is especially hazardous to the eyes and may produce severe damage. When phosphorus (yellow) is swallowed, after a delay of a few hours, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain may occur. The vomit may smell like garlic and glow in the dark. After 24 to 36 hours, the symptoms may go away. In a few

hours or 2 or 3 days, the nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain may reappear with diarrhea and a yellow color to the skin. Death may occur.

2. Long-term Exposure: Repeated or prolonged exposure to phosphorus (yellow) can cause "phossy jaw" with pain and swelling of the jaw, toothaches, loosening of the teeth and destruction of the jawbone. Chronic exposure to phosphorus (yellow) can also cause weakness, anemia, loss of appetite, stomach complaints, cough, and paleness. In addition, chronic exposure to phosphorus (yellow) may cause bones to become brittle and break.

3. Reporting Signs and Symptoms: A physician should be contacted if anyone develops any signs or symptoms and suspects that they are caused by exposure to phosphorus (yellow).

• Recommended medical surveillance

The following medical procedures should be made available to each employee who is exposed to phosphorus (yellow) at potentially hazardous levels:

1. Initial Medical Examination:

—A complete history and physical examination: The purpose is to detect pre-existing conditions that might place the exposed employee at increased risk, and to establish a baseline for future health monitoring. Examination of the eyes, respiratory tract, liver, and kidneys should be stressed. Particular attention should be given to the jaw and teeth. The skin should be examined for evidence of chronic disorders.

—Dental examination: Phosphorus exposure may aggravate existing dental disorders such as caries, periodontal disease, retained roots, and cysts which may predispose to toxic necrosis of the jaw. Dental examination including x-rays should be performed.

—Liver function tests: Since liver damage has been observed in humans exposed to phosphorus, a profile of liver function should be obtained by using a medically acceptable array of biochemical tests.

—Complete blood count: Phosphorus exposure may cause anemia. A complete blood count should be per-

These recommendations reflect good industrial hygiene and medical surveillance practices and their implementation will assist in achieving an effective occupational health program. However, they may not be sufficient to achieve compliance with all requirements of OSHA regulations.

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formed including red and white blood cell count, a differential count of a stained blood smear, as well as hemoglobin and hematocrit.

2. Periodic Medical Examination: The aforementioned medical examinations should be repeated on an semi-annual basis.

• **Summary of toxicology**

Yellow phosphorus fume irritates the respiratory tract and eyes; the solid in contact with the skin produces deep thermal burns; prolonged absorption of phosphorus causes necrosis of facial bones. Yellow phosphorus spontaneously burns in air, and the vapors released are irritating to the respiratory tract. The early signs of systemic intoxication by phosphorus are abdominal pain, jaundice, and a garlic odor of the breath; prolonged intake may cause anemia, cachexia, and necrosis of bone, typically the maxilla and mandible. Complaints of possible overexposure among phosphorus workers may be toothache and excessive salivation; there may be dull red appearance of the oral mucosa; one or more teeth may loosen, followed by pain and swelling of the jaw; healing may be delayed following dental procedures such as extractions; with necrosis of bone, sequestra may develop with sinus tract formation. In a series of 10 cases, the shortest period of exposure to phosphorus fume leading to bone necrosis was 10 months (2 cases) and the longest was 18 years. Yellow phosphorus fume causes severe eye irritation with blepharospasm, photophobia, and lacrimation; the solid in the eye produces severe injury. Phosphorus burns on the skin are deep and painful; a firm eschar is produced and is surrounded by vesiculation.

CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

• **Physical data**

1. Molecular weight: 123.9
2. Boiling point (760 mm Hg): 279 C (535 F)
3. Specific gravity (water = 1): 1.82
4. Vapor density (air = 1 at boiling point of phosphorus (yellow)): 4.4
5. Melting point: 44 C (111 F)
6. Vapor pressure at 20 C (68 F): 0.026 mm Hg
7. Solubility in water, g/100 g water at 20 C (68 F): 0.0003
8. Evaporation rate (butyl acetate = 1): Not applicable

• **Reactivity**

1. Conditions contributing to instability: Light causes formation of yellow or red color.
2. Incompatibilities: Contact with air and all oxidizing agents (including elemental sulfur) will cause fires and explosions. Contact with strong caustics will cause formation of poisonous and flammable phosphine gas.
3. Hazardous decomposition products: Toxic gases and vapors (such as phosphoric acid fume) may be released in a fire involving phosphorus (yellow).
4. Special precautions: Liquid phosphorus (yellow) will attack some forms of plastics, rubber, and coatings.

• **Flammability**

1. Flash point: Ignites spontaneously in air at or above 30 C (86 F)
2. Autoignition temperature: 30 C (86 F)
3. Flammable limits in air, % by volume: Not applicable
4. Extinguishant: Water, carbon dioxide, sand, worth, dry chemical

• **Warning properties**

Grant states that yellow phosphorus fumes are "irritating to the respiratory tract and cause severe ocular irritation with blepharospasm, photophobia, and lacrimation. Particles of white phosphorus (yellow phosphorus) are caustic and seriously damaging in contact with tissues."

No quantitative information is available concerning the concentrations that produce eye irritation, however.

MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT PROCEDURES

• **General**

Measurements to determine employee exposure are best taken so that the average eight-hour exposure is based on a single eight-hour sample or on two four-hour samples. Several short-time interval samples (up to 30 minutes) may also be used to determine the average exposure level. Air samples should be taken in the employee's breathing zone (air that would most nearly represent that inhaled by the employee).

• **Method**

An analytical method for phosphorus (yellow) is in the *NIOSH Manual of Analytical Methods*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, 1978, available from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 (GPO No. 017-033-00317-3).

RESPIRATORS

• Good industrial hygiene practices recommend that engineering controls be used to reduce environmental concentrations to the permissible exposure level. However, there are some exceptions where respirators may be used to control exposure. Respirators may be used when engineering and work practice controls are not technically feasible, when such controls are in the process of being installed, or when they fail and need to be supplemented. Respirators may also be used for operations which require entry into tanks or closed vessels, and in emergency situations. If the use of respirators is necessary, the only respirators permitted are those that have been approved by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (formerly Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration) or by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

• In addition to respirator selection, a complete respiratory protection program should be instituted which includes regular training, maintenance, inspection, cleaning, and evaluation.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Employees should be provided with and required to use flame-retardant clothing, gloves, face shields (eight-inch minimum), and other appropriate protective clothing necessary to prevent any possibility of skin contact with solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow).
- Clothing contaminated with phosphorus (yellow) should be placed underwater in closed containers for storage until it can be discarded or until provision is made for the removal of phosphorus (yellow) from the clothing. If the clothing is to be laundered or otherwise cleaned to remove the phosphorus (yellow), the person performing the operation should be informed of phosphorus (yellow)'s hazardous properties.
- Where there is any possibility of exposure of an employee's body to solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow), facilities for quick drenching of the body should be provided within the immediate work area for emergency use.
- Any clothing which becomes contaminated with phosphorus (yellow) should be removed immediately and not reworn until the phosphorus (yellow) is removed from the clothing.
- Employees should be provided with and required to use dust- and splash-proof safety goggles where there is any possibility of solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow) contacting the eyes.
- Where there is any possibility that employees' eyes may be exposed to solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow), an eye-wash fountain should be provided within the immediate work area for emergency use.

SANITATION

- Skin that becomes contaminated with phosphorus (yellow) should be immediately washed or showered with soap or mild detergent and water to remove any phosphorus (yellow).
- Workers subject to skin contact with solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow) should wash with soap or mild detergent and water any areas of the body which may have contacted phosphorus (yellow) at the end of each work day.
- Eating and smoking should not be permitted in areas where solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow) are handled, processed, or stored.
- Employees who handle solid or liquid phosphorus (yellow) should wash their hands thoroughly with soap or mild detergent and water before eating, smoking, or using toilet facilities.

COMMON OPERATIONS AND CONTROLS

The following list includes some common operations in which exposure to phosphorus (yellow) may occur and control methods which may be effective in each case:

Operation

Use in synthesis of high purity phosphoric acid salts for use as fertilizers, water treatment chemicals, food products, beverages, and dentrifices; use in synthesis of inorganic phosphorus compounds for use as pesticides, flame retardants for plastics and fibers, and gasoline and lube oil additives; use in synthesis of inorganic and organic compounds

Use in manufacture of phosphorus alloys for introduction into low carbon steel, copper alloys, copper pipe, and bronze

Use in manufacture of explosives, munitions, and pyrotechnics for military use

Use as a catalyst in synthesis of acrylonitrile and organic bromine compounds

Use during conversion of yellow phosphorus to red phosphorus for manufacture of wood and paper safety matches

Use as an ingredient of rat poison and roach powders

Controls

Process enclosure; local exhaust ventilation; general dilution ventilation

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Material substitution

EMERGENCY FIRST AID PROCEDURES

In the event of an emergency, institute first aid procedures and send for first aid or medical assistance.

• Eye Exposure

If phosphorus (yellow) gets into the eyes, wash eyes immediately with large amounts of water, lifting the lower and upper lids occasionally. Get medical attention immediately. Contact lenses should not be worn when working with this chemical.

• Skin Exposure

If phosphorus (yellow) gets on the skin, immediately flush the contaminated skin with water. If phosphorus (yellow) penetrates through the clothing, remove the clothing immediately and flush the skin with water. Get medical attention immediately. The skin should be kept wet until medical attention is obtained to prevent any remaining phosphorus (yellow) from burning.

• Breathing

If a person breathes in large amounts of phosphorus (yellow), move the exposed person to fresh air at once. If breathing has stopped, perform artificial respiration. Keep the affected person warm and at rest. Get medical attention as soon as possible.

• Swallowing

When phosphorus (yellow) has been swallowed and the person is conscious, give the person large quantities of water immediately. After the water has been swallowed, try to get the person to vomit by having him touch the back of his throat with his finger. Do not make an unconscious person vomit. Get medical attention immediately.

• Rescue

Move the affected person from the hazardous exposure. If the exposed person has been overcome, notify someone else and put into effect the established emergency rescue procedures. Do not become a casualty. Understand the facility's emergency rescue procedures and know the locations of rescue equipment before the need arises.

SPILL AND DISPOSAL PROCEDURES

• Persons not wearing protective equipment and clothing should be restricted from areas of spills until cleanup has been completed.

• If phosphorus (yellow) is spilled, the following step should be taken:

1. Immediately douse the spill with water and cover with wet sand or dirt.

• Waste disposal method:

Phosphorus (yellow), after solidification and covering with wet sand or dirt, may be disposed of in a secured sanitary landfill.

REFERENCES

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RESPIRATORY PROTECTION FOR PHOSPHORUS (YELLOW)

Condition	Minimum Respiratory Protection* Required Above 0.1 mg/m ³
Particulate Concentration	
5 mg/m ³ or less	A high efficiency particulate filter respirator with a full facepiece. Any supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece, helmet, or hood. Any self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece.
200 mg/m ³ or less	A Type C supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode or with a full facepiece, helmet, or hood operated in continuous-flow mode.
Greater than 200 mg/m ³ or entry and escape from unknown concentrations	Self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode. A combination respirator which includes a Type C supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure or continuous-flow mode and an auxiliary self-contained breathing apparatus operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode.
Fire Fighting	Self-contained breathing apparatus with a full facepiece operated in pressure-demand or other positive pressure mode.

*Only NIOSH-approved or MSHA-approved equipment should be used.