

Cement, concrete and plaster

Reason	Some types of material used in construction are known to cause harm to the environment and to the user when working with them unless precautions are taken. If you recognise the problems and know what action to take you can help to prevent environmental and personal harm.
Outline	This talk covers some of the types of material involved and some controls.



Take precautions when working with concrete and cement



Concrete wash water needs to be controlled



A clearly designated washout area



Use designated washout areas to clean off tools and equipment after you have finished work



Wet concrete is potentially hazardous to the skin as it burns and causes considerable damage to the cell structure. It can, in extreme cases, result in amputation.

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Materials in their dry and wet state

1. All dusty materials (cement, lime, plaster and sand) can cause health hazards to the skin, eyes and lungs.
2. Cement, concrete and plaster should be disposed of and washed out only at the designated locations.
3. Only use designated washout areas to clean off plant and equipment, as the dirty water can pollute watercourses if it is not disposed of properly.
4. Wet concrete and mortar are potentially hazardous to the skin as they burn and damage the cell structure. Where incorrect or inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) has been worn, this has, in some cases, resulted in amputations.
5. Poor storage facilities, damp environments, burst bags or leaking bulk storage systems cause environmental hazards, through potential contamination of the ground and watercourses.

Control measures

1. Be aware of personal hygiene, wear the correct PPE and wash properly before consuming food.
2. Ensure that the storage area of materials is suitable.
3. Carry out mixing and batching works in areas well away from watercourses, gullies and drains.
4. Use designated washout areas and ensure that delivery drivers (of concrete or similar products) are aware of where they can wash out.
5. Waste plasterboard should be segregated and disposed of in a separate skip.
6. Minimise your exposure to dust from dry materials by wearing the correct PPE and/or RPE.

Precautions

1. Do not hose down spills of materials into watercourses or drains. Severe environmental damage can be an outcome.
2. Do not allow washout water to enter watercourses or drains.
3. Wear appropriate PPE – your health is important to both you and your employer.



What should you do if you do not have the correct PPE for your work?
Where is the right place to wash out a container used for mixing rendering plaster?
Why is it important not to let discharges into watercourses or drains?



Now inform your workers of the company provision for delivery, handling, storage and safe use of materials.