

# Guidance Document

center for the polyurethanes industry • spray polyurethane foam alliance

## Interior Spray Polyurethane Foam Insulation Health & Safety Q&A

### For Spray Foam Contractors



This Interior Spray Polyurethane Foam Insulation Health & Safety Q&A document (describing spray applications done on the inside of a building) and the companion Exterior Spray Polyurethane Foam Insulation Health & Safety Q&A document (describing spray applications done on the outside of a building) were created to provide general guidelines for safe spray polyurethane foam application.

These general guidelines are intended to supplement the specific and detailed information from the materials suppliers (Material Safety Data Sheet and Product Data Sheet) that you are using for your installation. Many different variables are present in the various applications, so each case must be evaluated individually so that proper protection is afforded. It is applicable to those on or around the worksite where spray foam is being installed.

#### What are the chemicals used in spray polyurethane foam (SPF)?

**A-Side or “Iso”:** Also known as polymeric methylene diphenyl diisocyanate or “PMDI” and typically contains 50% MDI and 50% higher molecular weight oligomers of MDI.

**B-Side or “Resin”:** Also known as the polyol blend, and is comprised mostly of polyols, with smaller amounts of catalysts, blowing agents (closed cell foam only), flame retardants, and surfactants.

#### What are the potential health hazards of SPF chemicals?

##### A-side

Inhalation overexposure can result in 1) irritation of the nose, throat, and lungs, causing runny nose, sore throat, coughing, tightness in the chest, and shortness of breath, and 2) respiratory tract sensitization (i.e., the development of asthma) with symptoms of chest tightness, shortness of breath, coughing, and/or wheezing. Note that severe asthma attacks can be life threatening. NIOSH notes that “early recognition of sensitization and prompt and strict elimination of exposures is essential to reduce the risk of long-term or permanent respiratory problems for workers who have become sensitized.”

Skin contact can cause 1) irritation, and 2) sensitization (allergy). Symptoms include reddening, itching, swelling, and rash. Skin contact alone may lead to respiratory sensitization. Eye contact can cause reddening, tearing, stinging, and/or swelling of the eyes.

##### B-side

Inhalation overexposure may result in irritation of the respiratory tract, causing cough, sore throat, and runny nose. Irritation of the eyes (liquid or vapor) and skin (liquid) also are possible. In addition, skin contact with some amine catalysts may lead to skin sensitization. Cardiac arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat) is a symptom of overexposure to certain blowing agents. In addition, the vapors of some amine catalysts can temporarily cause vision to become foggy or blurry, and halos may appear around bright objects such as lights.

Refer to your supplier's Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for a complete listing of the composition and potential health effects of A and B-side chemicals.

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Due to the potential health hazards just mentioned, it is important to avoid inhalation of, and skin and eye contact with SPF chemicals.

## What type of personal protective equipment (PPE) should sprayers wear during spraying?



- NIOSH-approved full-face or hood-type supplied air respirator (SAR) operated in positive pressure or continuous flow mode.

Note: Respirators should be used in accordance with your company's written Respiratory Protection Program (RPP), which is required by the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). Among other items, the RPP should include provisions for medical evaluations, fit testing, training, and cartridge change-out schedules.



- Disposable coverall with attached hood. It is important that all exposed skin be covered. Where heat stress may be a concern, consider the use of lightweight disposable coveralls.
- Disposable over-boots with skid-resistant soles. In circumstances where overboots may create a slip/fall hazard, its use may be omitted.
- Fabric gloves fully coated with nitrile, neoprene, butyl, or PVC. Alternatively, cotton gloves over nitrile gloves may be used.



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## What type of PPE should helpers wear while spraying is being conducted?

Helpers working in the application area should wear a full-face or hood-type SAR, disposable coveralls with attached hood, and nitrile, neoprene, butyl, or PVC

gloves. Other glove options include 1) fabric gloves fully coated in nitrile, neoprene, butyl, or PVC; and 2) cotton gloves over nitrile gloves. In some cases, such as when the work area is well ventilated or when helpers are not working in the immediate vicinity of the applicator, helpers may be able to wear full face air purifying respirators (APR) with organic vapor/particulate (P100) cartridges instead of SAR's. Professional judgment must be exercised in making this determination, taking into consideration the specific circumstances of the job site/application.

Appropriate PPE, such as respiratory protection, disposable coverall with attached hood, and gloves (see glove options mentioned in the preceding paragraph), should be worn during trimming of foam and during clean-up activities in the application area following spraying.

## What type of PPE should be worn during handling of liquid SPF chemicals?

The type of PPE used will depend on the particular activity and the associated potential for exposure. The following suggestions are offered as general guidance.



- Chemical safety goggles



- Nitrile, neoprene, butyl, or PVC gloves
- If splash to the body is possible, impermeable protective clothing (e.g., PVC, polyethylene)



- If handling heated SPF chemicals, NIOSH-approved APR with combination organic vapor/particulate (P100) cartridges

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## What type of PPE should be worn during handling of solvents?

Consult the manufacturer's MSDS.

## What are the suggested first-aid measures?

First-aid measures can be found on the MSDS. Here are some typical first-aid suggestions:

### Inhalation

- Move the individual to fresh air.
- Administer CPR and/or oxygen if needed.
- Seek immediate medical attention.

### Eyes

- Flush with lukewarm water for at least 15 minutes.
- Seek medical attention.

### Skin

- Remove contaminated clothing.
- Wash thoroughly with soap and water.
- Seek medical attention if irritation develops or persists.

### Ingestion

- Do not induce vomiting.
- If conscious, rinse mouth with water.
- Seek medical attention.

## What are some good work practices to follow?

- Have the most current MSDS for each chemical brought onto the jobsite, readily available (e.g., keep in the spray rig)
- Prior to the start of each job, it is advisable to have a discussion with the building owner and/or occupant(s) to talk about items such as potential odors associated with the newly-installed foam and any other questions the owner/occupant may have, such as reoccupancy times.
- Exposure to others can be minimized by vacating the entire building of persons other than the spray foam application team during SPF application and for a period of time following installation. For projects where this is not feasible or necessary, (e.g., large commercial buildings), take steps to keep other persons out of part of the building to be sprayed, and discourage entrance into the spray area by using warning/caution tape and/or signage.

- Shut down HVAC system, and temporarily seal off (e.g., plastic sheeting and tape) HVAC system components in the work area.
- Always follow the manufacturer's application instructions with respect to lift (layer or pass) thickness and time between lifts. Spraying foam too thickly in a single lift or not permitting sufficient time between lifts may generate excessive heat to the point where the foam may char, smolder, or burn.
- Ventilate the application area for a period of time following installation to purge aerosols and vapors from the structure (preferably via fans exhausting air at one side, and open windows/doors on the opposite side). The post-installation ventilation time will vary based on the size of the area, amount of foam applied, the particular foam formulation applied, ventilation rate, and other relevant factors. Discourage entrance by others during the ventilation period. Contact your SPF supplier for recommendations as to ventilation and reoccupancy time.
- Display prominent warning signs at all entrances to the work area identifying the fire dangers of open flames, welding, and sparks until a thermal barrier (e.g., drywall) is applied over the installed foam.
- General housekeeping and clean-up is an important part of the job. Conduct jobsite control and identify appropriate warning signs/tape along with site assessment before, during and after project completion. Dispose of waste materials in accordance with applicable regulatory requirements.

## How should spills be addressed?

- Direct all personnel away from the immediate area.
- Have individuals trained in spill clean-up don appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Absorb the spilled material with sand, earth or absorbent clays (e.g., vermiculite or cat litter). Place the absorbed material in drums (for MDI, use a neutralization solution (see MSDS), and do not seal these drums for an appropriate period (e.g., at least 72 hours).

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- If a very large amount of MDI has been spilled (approximately 10,000 lbs of PMDI, or about 15 55-gallon drums), you must report the spill to various government agencies. In addition, contact CHEMTRAC® (1-800-424-9300) for assistance.
- Comply with all applicable federal, state, and local waste disposal regulations, and dispose of accordingly.

## How should empty drums be disposed?

- Offer the empty drums to a qualified reconditioner.
- Offer the empty drums to a reclaimer for recycling (note: neutralization of empty PMDI drums is wise prior to transfer to the recycler).
- Empty the drums in accordance with the drum reconditioner's or recycler's instructions, as well as in accordance with state and federal regulations (e.g., less than 1" of liquid product in a drum is considered empty by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).

## Where can I get more information?

- American Chemistry Council (ACC):
  - ACC Center for the Polyurethanes Industry (CPI) websites:
    - [www.americanchemistry.com/polyurethane](http://www.americanchemistry.com/polyurethane) - Select "Safety" or "Health"
    - [www.americanchemistry.com/spf](http://www.americanchemistry.com/spf) or [www.spraypolyurethane.com](http://www.spraypolyurethane.com)
    - "Health & Safety Aspects of SPF Applications" DVD - 2002.  
[www.americanchemistry.com/polyurethane](http://www.americanchemistry.com/polyurethane) - Select "Order Publications".
    - "Safe Handling of Diphenylmethane Diisocyanate (MDI)" - 2007.  
[www.americanchemistry.com/spf](http://www.americanchemistry.com/spf) or [www.spraypolyurethane.com](http://www.spraypolyurethane.com). Also available from MDI suppliers.
  - ACC Diisocyanates Panel (DII):
    - [http://www.americanchemistry.com/s\\_acc/sec\\_iso.asp?CID=1547&DID=5866](http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_acc/sec_iso.asp?CID=1547&DID=5866)
  - Spray Polyurethane Foam Alliance (SPFA)
    - [www.sprayfoam.org](http://www.sprayfoam.org) - Select "Health & Safety"

- U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
  - [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/isocyanates](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/isocyanates) - Safety and Health Topic: Isocyanates
- Material Safety Data Sheets and other health and safety literature can be obtained by contacting your spray polyurethane foam supplier.

## For more information, visit:

**The American Chemistry Council's Center for the Polyurethanes Industry**

[www.americanchemistry.com/polyurethane](http://www.americanchemistry.com/polyurethane) or  
[www.spraypolyurethane.com](http://www.spraypolyurethane.com)

**Spray Polyurethane Foam Alliance**

[www.sprayfoam.org](http://www.sprayfoam.org)

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