

# HEALTH & SAFETY NOTICE

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## SENSITIZERS



Sensitizers, found in industrial workplaces such as mines, are chemical agents or irritants known to cause severe allergic-type reactions. Sensitization occurs when the human body reacts to a chemical agent or irritant with an immune response. Sensitization may affect breathing by causing airways to narrow and/or cause skin rashes and lesions. Sensitization may start immediately or take days to years to develop after exposure to a sensitizing agent. Once sensitized, symptoms may be immediate and intense and get progressively worse with each re-exposure. Sensitization can be life-threatening. If a worker has become sensitized, they should not be re-exposed to the same or similar agent.

Mine managers must be aware of the hazardous products and agents used on their mine sites. For example, resin commonly used in ground control applications, spray foam sealants, paints, or coatings may contain sensitizing chemicals.

Safety data sheets (SDS) are one of the best ways to determine if a product is known to have sensitizing effects or if it poses other risks to workers' health and safety. SDS includes safe handling and storage techniques, required personal protective equipment and emergency response instructions. Some sensitizers, such as isocyanates, are referenced in the Health, Safety and Reclamation Code for Mines in BC (Code) and have specific, mandatory requirements for their safe handling and use on a mine site in BC.

### Recommendations:

- Identify the sensitizing agents used in the mine; consider eliminating or substituting these products;
- Ensure workers are up to date with WHMIS training; consider mandatory recurrent training;
- Provide clear instructions, including safe operating procedures for using sensitizing or other hazardous agents;
- Include review/special approvals in purchasing and warehousing policies to identify new products with sensitizing effects;
- Encourage workers to enrol in Code-required medical surveillance programs; and
- Provide personal protective equipment, including training on how to safely use, clean, and store the equipment.

### Resources

- [Canadian Centre for Occupation Health & Safety – Asthma, work-related](#)
- [WorkSafeBC - Asthma](#)
- [WHMIS Quick Facts](#)