



Formaldehyde in clothing

Formaldehyde: the basics

Formaldehyde is a naturally occurring substance in our atmosphere. It is emitted by animals and humans as a by-product of digestion, and it is created during combustion. It can be found in smoke from fires, smog, tobacco smoke and vehicular exhaust fumes.

In more concentrated forms, formaldehyde is used in a number of industrial processes in a variety of industries, including the textile industry. Formaldehyde is generally used to give a permanent press effect to clothing, to increase stain resistance and for colour fastness. It is also used to keep garments looking new and fresh while in transit, and to retard mildew growth.

Dealing with formaldehyde safely

The Ministry is advising people that it is good practice for new, washable garments to be thoroughly washed and aired, preferably outside, before use, and for new clothes labelled as "dry-clean only" to be thoroughly aired before use.

The most common effect is skin irritation. Contact your GP if you are concerned about symptoms that you think may be due to formaldehyde.

More information about formaldehyde and safety

- [Government Product Safety Policy Statement on Acceptable Limits of Formaldehyde in Clothing and Other Textiles](#)
- [Media Release Formaldehyde tests show no health issue in clothes -17 October 2007](#)
- [Evaluation of Alleged Unacceptable Formaldehyde Levels in Clothing](#)

Questions and Answers

What is formaldehyde?

Formaldehyde is a naturally occurring substance in our atmosphere. It is emitted by animals and humans as a by-product of digestion, and it is created during combustion. It can be found in smoke from fires, smog, tobacco smoke and vehicular exhaust fumes.

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Why is formaldehyde used in clothing?

Formaldehyde is generally used to give a permanent press effect to clothing, to increase stain resistance and for colour fastness. It is also used to keep garments looking new and fresh while in transit, and to retard mildew growth.

What can I do about any formaldehyde in the clothing I buy?

The Ministry is advising people that it is good practice for new, washable garments to be thoroughly washed and aired, preferably outside, before use, and for new clothes labelled as "dry-clean only" to be thoroughly aired before use.

What are the possible health effects of formaldehyde used on clothing?

The most common effect is skin irritation.

What can I do if I am concerned about symptoms which I think may be due to formaldehyde?

Contact your GP.

What is the Ministry doing about formaldehyde in clothing?

The Ministry has opened an urgent investigation and will test clothing, and look at how other countries deal with formaldehyde in clothing. Once the investigation is complete the Ministry will consider what action should be taken.