FOI REF: 26/004

23rd January 2026

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

Eastbourne District General Hospital
Kings Drive
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 2UD

Tel: 0300 131 4500
Website: www.esht.nhs.uk

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

I am responding to your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act. The answers to your specific questions are as follows:

Please provide the following information relating to employee exposure to formaldehyde (formalin) in the Trust's operating/surgical theatres.

Documents requested:

1. **Please provide the current COSHH risk assessment(s) relating to formaldehyde (formalin) exposure for staff working in operating/surgical theatres, produced to meet the Trust's duties under COSHH Regulation 6.**

   Please see the attached Trust wide COSHH Assessment and note that East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust does not have a specific COSHH risk assessment relating to formaldehyde for staff working in operating/surgical theatres.

2. **Please provide copies of all formaldehyde (formalin) exposure monitoring data held by the Trust for operating/surgical theatre staff for the last 12 months, including:**

   a. **Fixed/static air monitoring results**

   b. **Personal exposure or badge monitoring results**

   (with personal data redacted as appropriate)
   This request includes monitoring undertaken for any purpose, including baseline, verification, and/or investigation monitoring, in line with COSHH Regulation 10. It is noted that COSHH Regulation 10(5)(b) requires such records to be kept for a minimum of five years.

   The Trust does not currently monitor operating/surgical staff for exposure to formaldehyde, please refer to question 6.

3. **How does the Trust prevent or control employee exposure to formaldehyde (formalin) in its operating/surgical theatres, including but not limited to engineering, procedural, and/or organisational controls?**

   Please refer to question 6.

4. **Does the Trust undertake regular scheduled formaldehyde (formalin) exposure monitoring in operating/surgical theatres? If so, please state the frequency.**

   None, please refer to question 6.

5. **Please state the total number of occasions on which regular scheduled formaldehyde (formalin) exposure monitoring has been undertaken in operating/surgical theatres in the last 12 months.**

   None, please refer to question 6.

6. **If regular scheduled formaldehyde (formalin) exposure monitoring is not undertaken, please provide documentation held by the Trust that demonstrates the effectiveness of current controls and supports the decision that routine monitoring is not required. If no such documentation is held, please confirm how the Trust assures compliance with COSHH Regulations 7 and 10 in the absence of routine exposure monitoring.**

   Based on previous dynamic risk assessments, staff working in Theatres and across the Trust where formaldehyde is used are not being exposed to concentrations exceeding the Workplace Exposure Limits, due to robust control measures implemented such as LEV, duration of exposure, training and PPE.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Should you be dissatisfied with the Trust's response to your request, you have the right to request an internal review. Please write to the Freedom of Information Department (esh-tr.foi@nhs.net), quoting the above reference, within 40 working days. The Trust is not obliged to accept an internal review after this date.

Should you still be dissatisfied with your FOI request, you have the right of complaint to the Information Commissioner at the following address:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Department
esh-tr.foi@nhs.net

COSHH Activity Assessment Report

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Substance			
Product Name	Neutral Buffered Formalin 10%	**CAS Number(s)**	
Manufacturer	Various	**EINECS Number(s)**	
WEL	Please see Safety Data Sheet (SDS)	**Substance Identity**	Clear liquid with pungent odour.
Recommended Use And Restrictions On Use	Fixative for tissues to be examined by microscopy		
Manufacturer's Product Code			

Record Details			
Reference	1549	**Assessor Name**	David McLoughlin
Org Unit	ESHT	**Job Title**	Staff
Location	Trust Wide	**Assessment Date**	24/12/2024
Authorised for use by	Trust	**Date Authorised**	
Locality	Cross-Site		
Product Name	Neutral Buffered Formalin 10%		

Hazards

Classification Type	Classification	Category	Hazard Label	Signal Word	Hazard Statement
Health	Acute Toxicity: Oral	Category 4		Warning	H302: Harmful if swallowed
Health	Skin Sensitisation	Category 1		Warning	H317: May cause an allergic skin reaction
Health	Germ Cell Mutagenicity	Category 2		Warning	H341: Suspected of causing genetic defects

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Health	Carcinogenicity	Category 1A, 1B (H350)		Danger	H350: May cause cancer
Health	Acute toxicity, dermal	Category 3		Danger	H311: Toxic in contact with skin
Health	Serious Eye Damage/Eye Irritation	Category 1		Danger	H318: Causes serious eye damage
Health	Acute Toxicity: Inhalation	Category 1		Danger	H330: Fatal if inhaled
Health	Acute Toxicity: Inhalation	Category 3		Danger	H331: Toxic if inhaled
Health	Acute Toxicity: Inhalation	Category 4		Warning	H332: Harmful if inhaled
Health	Specific Target Organ Toxicity (Single Exposure); Respiratory tract irritation	Category 3		Warning	H335: May cause respiratory irritation
Health	Specific Target Organ Toxicity (Single Exposure)	Category 1		Danger	H370: Causes damage to organs

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Tasks

Activity Type & Activity Description	Persons At Risk & How Is Person At Risk	Control Measures	Actual Risk Rating	Additional Control Measures	Potential Risk Rating
Transportation Transporting samples from the designated storage area to pathology.	Staff Others All solutions containing formalin are suspected carcinogens, mutagens and sensitisers. Acute exposure may cause rhinitis, cough/wheeze, bronchospasm; repeated exposure can lead to allergic contact dermatitis and occupational asthma. Risk of spillage / leakage leading to inhalation and build-up of fumes and skin contact which may cause allergic reactions; and sensitisation.	The solutions should be handled with care, minimising skin contact. Formaldehyde vapours in the air are also harmful. The safety limit for formaldehyde in air is 2 part per million (2ppm). This means workers should not be exposed to formaldehyde vapour above this level (averaged over 15 minute period) for more than 15 minutes at a time Transport and store containers within leak-proof secondary trays to manage potential leaks and spills. All samples are placed in specially supplied sealable containers, then placed in a plastic bag and sealed. All containers are transported via a designated wheeled container to pathology. The transport container has a designated spills kit attached to it. A hand transport bag is also available for small specimens. The amount of formalin being transported by hand should not exceed approximately 250ml in total. The transport bag MUST have a grey absorbent mat in it and the specimens must be sealed in another bag. All staff are trained to use the spills kit. For minor spills (up to 200ml) a spill of this size is unlikely to contaminate the air to dangerous levels if dealt with promptly. The spill can be wiped up with absorbent material by staff members wearing suitable impervious gloves such as nitrile gloves. The contaminated material should be sealed in plastic bags for disposal and removed from the room as soon as possible. It is important not to simply dispose of the contaminated material in an open bin as the formaldehyde will continue to contaminate the air.	6 - Moderate Risk		6 - Moderate Risk

		Larger spills (200ml - 5 litres) a formaldehyde spill kit will be used. Evacuate all staff from immediate area and nearby areas of spillage Wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment and full face mask, use a formaldehyde spill kit to contain the spillage Ensure all materials used to tackle the spillage are appropriately contained and disposed of. Major spills (over 5 litres) - area evacuated and 2222 notified. Area evacuated and appropriate PPE worn.			

Quantity	20ml to 20 litres
Frequency Of Use	as required
Duration Of Use	=<10 minutes
Environment	Clinical/Treatment Areas
Form of Substance	Liquid
Main Route of Entry	Absorption
Approved For Use Within Area?	Yes


An Apron Must Be Worn


Hand protection must be worn


Masks must be worn


Respirators must be worn

Activity Type & Activity Description	Persons At Risk & How Is Person At Risk	Control Measures	Actual Risk Rating	Additional Control Measures	Potential Risk Rating
Use 30-60mls used for the preservation of histology specimens The formalin pot is placed in a secure wooden container. The wooden container rests on an absorbent pad. Each pot is used singularly for each individual specimen of the prostate and is removed from the secure wooden container at point of use.	Staff Others All solutions containing formalin are suspected carcinogens, mutagens and sensitisers. Acute exposure may cause rhinitis, cough/wheeze, bronchospasm; repeated exposure can lead to allergic contact dermatitis and occupational asthma. Risk of spillage / leakage and failure of LEV / downdraft	Formaldehyde vapours in the air are also harmful. The safety limit for formaldehyde in air is 2 part per million (2ppm). Good practice recommends this should be no more than 1ppm which is followed by the Trust. This means workers should not be exposed to formaldehyde vapour above this level (averaged over 15 minute period) for more than 15 minutes at a time. Health surveillance, including regular monitoring for respiratory and skin sensitisation, is required for staff working with formalin, alongside strict adherence to control measures such as local exhaust ventilation, use of appropriate PPE, and safe handling procedures.	6 - Moderate Risk		6 - Moderate Risk

The histology specimen is placed into a blue cage and secured in here by closing. Once closed, the blue cage is placed into the formalin pot. The formalin pot lid is removed at point of placing the blue cage. Once blue cage is in formalin pot the lid is secured tightly to the formalin pot. The formalin pot is placed back into the wooden container. *the wooden container is used for prostate biopsies. There are times when individual pots are used for bladder biopsies.* Decanting from 5ltr container into smaller containers containing tissue samples from Theatres for onwards transport to pathology.	leading to inhalation and build-up of fumes and skin contact which may cause allergic reactions; and sensitisation.	Formaldehyde Monitors are used and staff following laboratory procedures if this is exceeded by turning on extraction systems and leaving the room. The solutions should be handled with care, minimising skin contact. All handling (decanting, fixing, draining) should occur in an appropriate local exhaust ventilation (LEV) system—such as a fume hood or downdraft workstation—to minimise vapour release or in a well ventilated area (window open) Eye protection, aprons and glovers are provided and MUST be used at all times. Small prefilled pots are used where possible. First Aid kits are on site. Spills kit is available for use by trained staff. For minor spills (up to 200ml) a spill of this size is unlikely to contaminate the air to dangerous levels if dealt with promptly. The spill can be wiped up with absorbent material by staff members wearing suitable impervious gloves such as nitrile gloves. The contaminated material should be sealed in plastic bags for disposal and removed from the room as soon as possible. It is important not to simply dispose of the contaminated material in an open bin as the formaldehyde will continue to contaminate the air. Larger spills (200ml - 5 litres) a formaldehyde spill kit will be used. Evacuate all staff from immediate area and nearby areas of spillage Wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment and full face mask, use a formaldehyde spill kit to contain the spillage Ensure all materials used to tackle the spillage are appropriately contained and disposed of. Major spills (over 5 litres) - area evacuated and 2222 notified. Area evacuated and appropriate PPE worn. When used in Labs the containers are placed on downdraft bench		

		All staff trained complete Formalin and Spills training.			

Quantity	20mls to 20 litres
Frequency Of Use	as required
Duration Of Use	<=10 minutes
Environment	Clinical/Treatment Areas
Form of Substance	Vapour
Main Route of Entry	Multiple - Describe in Activity Description
Approved For Use Within Area?	Yes


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Masks must be worn


Respirators must be worn

Activity Type & Activity Description	Persons At Risk & How Is Person At Risk	Control Measures	Actual Risk Rating	Additional Control Measures	Potential Risk Rating

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Disposal Disposal of solution at the end of tasks	Staff Others All solutions containing formalin are suspected carcinogens, mutagens and sensitisers. Acute exposure may cause rhinitis, cough/wheeze, bronchospasm; repeated exposure can lead to allergic contact dermatitis and occupational asthma. Risk of spillage / leakage leading to inhalation and build-up of fumes and skin contact which may cause allergic reactions; and sensitisation.	Current guidelines allow general disposal of 10% (4% formaldehyde) formalin solutions used in medical and laboratory practice, to be discharged into mains drainage by diluting with copious amounts of water. Or dilute the solutions (≤ 4% formaldehyde, ≤ 5 gal/month or ≤ 1 gal/day) with a commercial neutraliser (e.g., Aldex™) in a fume hood or LEV area. Allowing for a minimum of 8 hours contact and confirming a pH level 6-9 prior to disposing. Eye protection, aprons and glovers are provided and MUST be used at all times. Bulk or high-concentration (> 4%) formalin, used or expired, must be collected by a licensed hazardous waste contractor, documented via consignment notes under UK Hazardous Waste Regs. 2005 Empty containers are rinsed thoroughly, deface/hazard-label, and dispose down the general trash once clean—unless classified as hazardous. First Aid and Spills kit are available for use by trained staff. Emergency Procedures in place and followed by Staff including reporting of spillages and evacuating the area.	6 - Moderate Risk		6 - Moderate Risk

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Quantity	20mls to 20 litres
Frequency Of Use	as required
Duration Of Use	<= 10 minutes
Environment	Clinical/Treatment Areas
Form of Substance	Vapour
Main Route of Entry	Multiple - Describe in Activity Description
Approved For Use Within Area?	Yes


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First Aid		**Seek Immediate Attention**
Inhalation	Remove person to fresh air and keep comfortable for breathing. Call doctor if you feel unwell. If exposed or concerned get medical advice/attention.	No
Skin Contact	Remove contaminated clothing and wash all affected areas with plenty of water. Wash contaminated clothing before reuse. If irritation (redness, rash, blistering) develops, get medical attention. If exposed or concerned get medical advice/attention	No
Eye Contact	Remove contact lenses if worn. Hold eye open and rinse slowly and gently with water for 15-20 minutes. If eye irritation persists get medical advice/attention.	No
Ingestion	Rinse mouth. Do not give anything by mouth to an unconscious person. Call a doctor if you feel unwell. IF exposed or concerned get medical advice/attention.	Yes
Injection		No

Storage and Disposal

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Storage Measures	Ensure adequate ventilation. In case of inadequate ventilation wear respiratory protection. Avoid contact with skin, eyes or clothing. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, avoid direct contact. Stop leak if safe to do so. Avoid release to the environment. Spillages or uncontrolled discharges into watercourses must be alerted to the appropriate regulatory body Keep only in the original container/package in a cool well-ventilated place. When not in use, keep containers tightly closed. Store at ambient temperature. Do not allow material to freeze. Keep away from heat, hot surfaces, sparks, open flames and other ignition sources. No smoking. Stable at ambient temperatures. Incompatible materials Strong acids and alkali. Strong reducing and oxidising agents. Avoid contact with alkali metals. Isocyanates. Aniline, Peroxides, Amines, Acid chlorides, acid anhydrides, strong bases, Phenols and halogenated phenols.
Emergency Measures	
Emergency Measures	Do not breathe vapour. Wear suitable protective clothing. Wear suitable respiratory protective equipment if exposure to high levels of material are likely. Do not use mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Avoid all contact. Ensure adequate ventilation. In case of inadequate ventilation wear respiratory protection. Avoid contact with skin, eyes or clothing. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, avoid direct contact. Stop leak if safe to do so. Avoid release to the environment. Spillages or uncontrolled discharges into watercourses must be alerted to the appropriate regulatory body
Fire Fighting	
Fire Fighting Measures	Extinguish with carbon dioxide, dry chemical, foam or waterspray
Unsuitable Fire Fighting Measures	Do not use water jet. Direct water jet may spread the fire
Transport	

	Transport Hazard Class(es)	**Transport Special Precautions**

Conclusion

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Conclusion	accepted risk as only used by competent staff in a controlled environment		
Have you considered using an alternative substance?	No		
Reasoning			
Actual Risk Rating	6	**Potential Risk Rating**	6