



# Right to Know Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet

Common Name: **POTASSIUM HYDROXIDE**

Synonyms: Caustic Potash; Lye; Potassium Hydrate

Chemical Name: Potassium Hydroxide (KOH)

Date: May 2001

Revision: January 2010

CAS Number: 1310-58-3

RTK Substance Number: 1571

DOT Number: UN 1813

## Description and Use

**Potassium Hydroxide** is an odorless, white or slightly yellow, flakey or lumpy solid which is often in a water solution. It is used in making soap, as an electrolyte in alkaline batteries and in electroplating, lithography, and paint and varnish removers. Liquid drain cleaners contain 25 to 36% of **Potassium Hydroxide**.

## Reasons for Citation

- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** is on the Right to Know Hazardous Substance List because it is cited by ACGIH, DOT, NIOSH, NFPA and EPA.
- ▶ This chemical is on the Special Health Hazard Substance List.

SEE GLOSSARY ON PAGE 5.

## FIRST AID

### Eye Contact

- ▶ Quickly brush off excess chemical from the face. Immediately flush with large amounts of water for at least 30 minutes, lifting upper and lower lids. Remove contact lenses, if worn, while flushing. Seek medical attention immediately.

### Skin Contact

- ▶ Quickly remove contaminated clothing. Immediately blot or brush off excess chemical and wash gently with large amounts of soap and water for at least 30 minutes. Seek medical attention immediately.

### Inhalation

- ▶ Remove the person from exposure.
- ▶ Begin rescue breathing (using universal precautions) if breathing has stopped and CPR if heart action has stopped.
- ▶ Transfer promptly to a medical facility.
- ▶ Medical observation is recommended for 24 to 48 hours after overexposure, as pulmonary edema may be delayed.

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

CHEMTREC: 1-800-424-9300

NJDEP Hotline: 1-877-927-6337

National Response Center: 1-800-424-8802

EMERGENCY RESPONDERS >>>> SEE LAST PAGE

## Hazard Summary

Hazard Rating	NJDHSS	NFPA
HEALTH	-	3
FLAMMABILITY	-	0
REACTIVITY	-	1
CORROSIVE POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE DOES NOT BURN		

Hazard Rating Key: 0=minimal; 1=slight; 2=moderate; 3=serious; 4=severe

- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** can affect you when inhaled and by passing through the skin.
- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** is a HIGHLY CORROSIVE CHEMICAL and contact can severely irritate and burn the skin and eyes leading to eye damage.
- ▶ Contact can irritate the nose and throat.
- ▶ Inhaling **Potassium Hydroxide** can irritate the lungs. Higher exposures may cause a build-up of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema), a medical emergency.
- ▶ Exposure to **Potassium Hydroxide** can cause headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting.
- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** may cause a skin allergy.

## Workplace Exposure Limits

NIOSH: The recommended airborne exposure limit (REL) is **2 mg/m<sup>3</sup>**, which should not be exceeded at any time.

ACGIH: The threshold limit value (TLV) is **2 mg/m<sup>3</sup>**, which should not be exceeded at any time.

- ▶ The above exposure limits are for air levels only. When skin contact also occurs, you may be overexposed, even though air levels are less than the limits listed above.

### Determining Your Exposure

- ▶ Read the product manufacturer’s Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and the label to determine product ingredients and important safety and health information about the product mixture.
- ▶ For each individual hazardous ingredient, read the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet, available on the RTK Program website ([www.nj.gov/health/eoh/rtkweb](http://www.nj.gov/health/eoh/rtkweb)) or in your facility’s RTK Central File or Hazard Communication Standard file.
- ▶ You have a right to this information under the New Jersey Worker and Community Right to Know Act and the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) Act if you are a public worker in New Jersey, and under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) if you are a private worker.
- ▶ The New Jersey Right to Know Act requires most employers to label chemicals in the workplace and requires public employers to provide their employees with information concerning chemical hazards and controls. The federal OSHA Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) and the PEOSH Hazard Communication Standard (N.J.A.C. 12:100-7) require employers to provide similar information and training to their employees.

This Fact Sheet is a summary of available information regarding the health hazards that may result from exposure. Duration of exposure, concentration of the substance and other factors will affect your susceptibility to any of the potential effects described below.

### Health Hazard Information

#### Acute Health Effects

The following acute (short-term) health effects may occur immediately or shortly after exposure to **Potassium Hydroxide**:

- ▶ Contact can severely irritate and burn the skin and eyes with possible eye damage.
- ▶ Contact can irritate the nose and throat.
- ▶ Inhaling **Potassium Hydroxide** can irritate the lungs causing coughing and/or shortness of breath. Higher exposures may cause a build-up of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema), a medical emergency, with severe shortness of breath.
- ▶ Exposure to **Potassium Hydroxide** can cause headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting.

#### Chronic Health Effects

The following chronic (long-term) health effects can occur at some time after exposure to **Potassium Hydroxide** and can last for months or years:

#### Cancer Hazard

- ▶ According to the information presently available to the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, **Potassium Hydroxide** has not been tested for its ability to cause cancer in animals.

#### Rproductive Hazard

- ▶ According to the information presently available to the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, **Potassium Hydroxide** has not been tested for its ability to affect reproduction.

#### Other Effects

- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** can irritate the lungs. Repeated exposure may cause bronchitis to develop with coughing, phlegm, and/or shortness of breath.
- ▶ Skin allergy may occur with itching, redness and/or an rash. If allergy develops, very low future exposure can trigger symptoms.

### Medical

#### Medical Testing

Before beginning employment and at regular times thereafter, (at least annually), the following are recommended:

- ▶ Lung function tests

If symptoms develop or overexposure is suspected, the following are recommended:

- ▶ Consider chest x-ray after acute overexposure
- ▶ Evaluation by a qualified allergist can help diagnose skin allergy.
- ▶ Exam of the eyes and vision

Any evaluation should include a careful history of past and present symptoms with an exam. Medical tests that look for damage already done are not a substitute for controlling exposure.

Request copies of your medical testing. You have a legal right to this information under the OSHA Access to Employee Exposure and Medical Records Standard (29 CFR 1910.1020).

#### Mixed Exposures

- ▶ Smoking can cause heart disease, lung cancer, emphysema, and other respiratory problems. It may worsen respiratory conditions caused by chemical exposure. Even if you have smoked for a long time, stopping now will reduce your risk of developing health problems.

## Workplace Controls and Practices

Very toxic chemicals, or those that are reproductive hazards or sensitizers, require expert advice on control measures if a less toxic chemical cannot be substituted. Control measures include: (1) enclosing chemical processes for severely irritating and corrosive chemicals, (2) using local exhaust ventilation for chemicals that may be harmful with a single exposure, and (3) using general ventilation to control exposures to skin and eye irritants. For further information on workplace controls, consult the NIOSH document on Control Banding at [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ctrlbanding/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ctrlbanding/).

The following work practices are also recommended:

- ▶ Label process containers.
- ▶ Provide employees with hazard information and training.
- ▶ Monitor airborne chemical concentrations.
- ▶ Use engineering controls if concentrations exceed recommended exposure levels.
- ▶ Provide eye wash fountains and emergency showers.
- ▶ Wash or shower if skin comes in contact with a hazardous material.
- ▶ Always wash at the end of the workshift.
- ▶ Change into clean clothing if clothing becomes contaminated.
- ▶ Do not take contaminated clothing home.
- ▶ Get special training to wash contaminated clothing.
- ▶ Do not eat, smoke, or drink in areas where chemicals are being handled, processed or stored.
- ▶ Wash hands carefully before eating, smoking, drinking, applying cosmetics or using the toilet.

In addition, the following may be useful or required:

- ▶ For solid **Potassium Hydroxide**, use a vacuum to reduce dust during clean-up. DO NOT DRY SWEEP.

## Personal Protective Equipment

The OSHA Personal Protective Equipment Standard (29 CFR 1910.132) requires employers to determine the appropriate personal protective equipment for each hazard and to train employees on how and when to use protective equipment.

The following recommendations are only guidelines and may not apply to every situation.

### Gloves and Clothing

- ▶ Avoid skin contact with **Potassium Hydroxide**. Wear personal protective equipment made from material which can not be permeated or degraded by this substance. Safety equipment suppliers and manufacturers can provide recommendations on the most protective glove and clothing material for your operation.
- ▶ Safety equipment manufacturers recommend Butyl, Nitrile, Neoprene, Polyvinyl Chloride, Viton and Barrier® as glove materials for **Potassium Hydroxide** in *solution*, and Tychem® BR, Responder®, and TK, or the equivalent, as protective clothing materials for **Potassium Hydroxide** in *solution*.
- ▶ All protective clothing (suits, gloves, footwear, headgear) should be clean, available each day, and put on before work.

### Eye Protection

- ▶ For *solid Potassium Hydroxide* wear eye protection with side shields or goggles.
- ▶ Wear indirect-vent, impact and splash resistant goggles when working with liquids.
- ▶ Wear a face shield along with goggles when working with corrosive, highly irritating or toxic substances.
- ▶ Do not wear contact lenses when working with this substance.

### Respiratory Protection

**Improper use of respirators is dangerous.** Respirators should only be used if the employer has implemented a written program that takes into account workplace conditions, requirements for worker training, respirator fit testing, and medical exams, as described in the OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).

- ▶ Where the potential exists for exposure over **2 mg/m<sup>3</sup>**, use a NIOSH approved full facepiece negative pressure, air-purifying, particulate filter respirator with an N, R or P95 filter. More protection is provided by a full facepiece respirator than by a half-mask respirator, and even greater protection is provided by a powered-air purifying respirator.
- ▶ Leave the area immediately if (1) while wearing a filter or cartridge respirator you can smell, taste, or otherwise detect **Potassium Hydroxide**, (2) while wearing particulate filters abnormal resistance to breathing is experienced, or (3) eye irritation occurs while wearing a full facepiece respirator. Check to make sure the respirator-to-face seal is still good. If it is, replace the filter or cartridge. If the seal is no longer good, you may need a new respirator.
- ▶ Consider all potential sources of exposure in your workplace. You may need a combination of filters, prefilters or cartridges to protect against different forms of a chemical (such as vapor and mist) or against a mixture of chemicals.
- ▶ Where the potential exists for exposure over **20 mg/m<sup>3</sup>**, use a NIOSH approved supplied-air respirator with a full facepiece operated in a pressure-demand or other positive-pressure mode. For increased protection use in combination with an auxiliary self-contained breathing apparatus or an emergency escape air cylinder.

## Fire Hazards

If employees are expected to fight fires, they must be trained and equipped as stated in the OSHA Fire Brigades Standard (29 CFR 1910.156).

- ▶ Extinguish fire using an agent suitable for type of surrounding fire. **Potassium Hydroxide** itself does not burn.
- ▶ POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE, including *Potassium Oxides*.
- ▶ DO NOT get water inside containers as contact with moisture or water may generate enough heat to ignite combustibles (wood, paper and oil).

Spills and Emergencies

If employees are required to clean-up spills, they must be properly trained and equipped. The OSHA Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard (29 CFR 1910.120) may apply.

If **Potassium Hydroxide** is spilled or leaked, take the following steps:

- ▶ Evacuate personnel and secure and control entrance to the area.
- ▶ Eliminate all ignition sources.
- ▶ Collect powdered material in the most convenient and safe manner and place into sealed containers for disposal.
- ▶ For **Potassium Hydroxide** in *solution* absorb liquids in vermiculite, dry sand, earth, or a similar material and place into sealed containers for disposal.
- ▶ Ventilate and wash area after clean-up is complete.
- ▶ DO NOT wash into sewer.
- ▶ It may be necessary to contain and dispose of **Potassium Hydroxide** as a HAZARDOUS WASTE. Contact your state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or your regional office of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for specific recommendations.

Handling and Storage

Prior to working with **Potassium Hydroxide** you should be trained on its proper handling and storage.

- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** reacts violently with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC).
- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** is CORROSIVE in MOIST AIR to METALS (such as ALUMINUM, ZINC, TIN and LEAD) and forms flammable and explosive *Hydrogen gas*.
- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** is not compatible with REDUCING AGENTS (such as LITHIUM, SODIUM, ALUMINUM and their HYDRIDES); WATER; HALOGENATED HYDROCARBONS (such as METHYLENE CHLORIDE and TRICHLOROETHYLENE); ORGANICS; NITROCARBONS; and AMMONIUM SALTS.
- ▶ Store in tightly closed containers in a cool, well-ventilated area away from WATER, MOISTURE and COMBUSTIBLES.
- ▶ **Potassium Hydroxide** attacks some forms of PLASTICS, RUBBER and COATINGS.

Occupational Health Information Resources

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Occupational Health Service, offers multiple services in occupational health. These services include providing informational resources, educational materials, public presentations, and industrial hygiene and medical investigations and evaluations.

**For more information, please contact:**

New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services  
 Right to Know Program  
 PO Box 368  
 Trenton, NJ 08625-0368  
 Phone: 609-984-2202  
 Fax: 609-984-7407  
 E-mail: rtk@doh.state.nj.us  
 Web address: <http://www.nj.gov/health/eoh/rtkweb>

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GLOSSARY

**ACGIH** is the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. They publish guidelines called Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) for exposure to workplace chemicals.

**Acute Exposure Guideline Levels (AEGLs)** are established by the EPA. They describe the risk to humans resulting from once-in-a-lifetime, or rare, exposure to airborne chemicals.

**Boiling point** is the temperature at which a substance can change its physical state from a liquid to a gas.

A **carcinogen** is a substance that causes cancer.

The **CAS number** is unique, identifying number, assigned by the Chemical Abstracts Service, to a specific chemical.

**CFR** is the Code of Federal Regulations, which are the regulations of the United States government.

A **combustible** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that will burn.

A **corrosive** substance is a gas, liquid or solid that causes destruction of human skin or severe corrosion of containers.

The **critical temperature** is the temperature above which a gas cannot be liquefied, regardless of the pressure applied.

**DEP** is the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

**DOT** is the Department of Transportation, the federal agency that regulates the transportation of chemicals.

**EPA** is the Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency responsible for regulating environmental hazards.

**ERG** is the Emergency Response Guidebook. It is a guide for emergency responders for transportation emergencies involving hazardous substances.

**Emergency Response Planning Guideline (ERPG)** values provide estimates of concentration ranges where one reasonably might anticipate observing adverse effects.

A **fetus** is an unborn human or animal.

A **flammable** substance is a solid, liquid, vapor or gas that will ignite easily and burn rapidly.

The **flash point** is the temperature at which a liquid or solid gives off vapor that can form a flammable mixture with air.

**IARC** is the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a scientific group.

**Ionization Potential** is the amount of energy needed to remove an electron from an atom or molecule. It is measured in electron volts.

**IRIS** is the Integrated Risk Information System database on human health effects that may result from exposure to various chemicals, maintained by federal EPA.

**LEL or Lower Explosive Limit**, is the lowest concentration of a combustible substance (gas or vapor) in the air capable of continuing an explosion.

**mg/m<sup>3</sup>** means milligrams of a chemical in a cubic meter of air. It is a measure of concentration (weight/volume).

A **mutagen** is a substance that causes mutations. A **mutation** is a change in the genetic material in a body cell. Mutations can lead to birth defects, miscarriages, or cancer.

**NFPA** is the National Fire Protection Association. It classifies substances according to their fire and explosion hazard.

**NIOSH** is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. It tests equipment, evaluates and approves respirators, conducts studies of workplace hazards, and proposes standards to OSHA.

**NTP** is the National Toxicology Program which tests chemicals and reviews evidence for cancer.

**OSHA** is the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards.

**PEOSHA** is the New Jersey Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act, which adopts and enforces health and safety standards in public workplaces.

**Permeated** is the movement of chemicals through protective materials.

**ppm** means parts of a substance per million parts of air. It is a measure of concentration by volume in air.

**Protective Action Criteria (PAC)** are values established by the Department of Energy and are based on AEGLs and ERPGs. They are used for emergency planning of chemical release events.

A **reactive** substance is a solid, liquid or gas that releases energy under certain conditions.

**STEL** is a Short Term Exposure Limit which is usually a 15-minute exposure that should not be exceeded at any time during a work day.

A **teratogen** is a substance that causes birth defects by damaging the fetus.

**UEL or Upper Explosive Limit** is the highest concentration in air above which there is too much fuel (gas or vapor) to begin a reaction or explosion.

**Vapor Density** is the ratio of the weight of a given volume of one gas to the weight of another (usually *Air*), at the same temperature and pressure.

The **vapor pressure** is a force exerted by the vapor in equilibrium with the solid or liquid phase of the same substance. The higher the vapor pressure the higher concentration of the substance in air.



Common Name: **POTASSIUM HYDROXIDE**

Synonyms: Caustic Potash; Lye; Potassium Hydrate

CAS No: 1310-58-3

Molecular Formula: KOH

RTK Substance No: 1571

Description: Odorless, white or slightly yellow, flakey or lumpy solid which is often in a water solution

**HAZARD DATA**

Hazard Rating	Firefighting	Reactivity
<b>3 - Health</b> <b>0 - Fire</b> <b>1 - Reactivity</b> <b>DOT#:</b> UN 1813 <b>ERG Guide #:</b> 154 <b>Hazard Class:</b> 8 (Corrosive)	Extinguish fire using an agent suitable for type of surrounding fire. <b>Potassium Hydroxide</b> itself does not burn. POISONOUS GASES ARE PRODUCED IN FIRE, including <i>Potassium Oxides</i> . DO NOT get water inside containers as contact with moisture or water may generate enough heat to ignite combustibles (wood, paper and oil).	<b>Potassium Hydroxide</b> reacts violently with STRONG ACIDS (such as HYDROCHLORIC, SULFURIC and NITRIC). <b>Potassium Hydroxide</b> is CORROSIVE in MOIST AIR to METALS (such as ALUMINUM, ZINC, TIN and LEAD) and forms flammable and explosive <i>Hydrogen gas</i> . <b>Potassium Hydroxide</b> is not compatible with REDUCING AGENTS (such as LITHIUM, SODIUM, ALUMINUM and their HYDRIDES); WATER; HALOGENATED HYDROCARBONS (such as METHYLENE CHLORIDE and TRICHLOROETHYLENE); ORGANICS; NITROCARBONS; and AMMONIUM SALTS.

**SPILL/LEAKS**

**Isolation Distance:**

Solid Spills: 25 meters (75 feet)

Liquid Spills: 50 meters (150 feet)

Fire: 800 meters (1/2 mile)

Collect powdered material in the most convenient and safe manner and place into sealed containers for disposal.

For **Potassium Hydroxide** in *solution* absorb liquids in dry sand, earth, or a similar material and place into sealed containers for disposal.

DO NOT wash into sewer.

For water spills, neutralize with dilute acid (such as Acetic Acid).

**Potassium Hydroxide** is harmful to aquatic life in very low concentrations.

**PHYSICAL PROPERTIES**

<b>Odor Threshold:</b>	Odorless
<b>Flash Point:</b>	Noncombustible
<b>Vapor Pressure:</b>	1 mm Hg at 1,317°F (714°C)
<b>Specific Gravity:</b>	2.04 (water = 1)
<b>Water Solubility:</b>	Soluble
<b>Boiling Point:</b>	2,408°F (1,320°C)
<b>Melting Point:</b>	761°F (405°C)
<b>Molecular Weight:</b>	56.1

**EXPOSURE LIMITS**

**NIOSH:** 2 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, Ceiling

**ACGIH:** 2 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, Ceiling

The Protective Action Criteria values are:

PAC-1 = 0.3 mg/m<sup>3</sup>

PAC-2 = 2 mg/m<sup>3</sup>

PAC-3 = 125 mg/m<sup>3</sup>

**PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

<b>Gloves:</b>	Butyl, Nitrile, Neoprene, Polyvinyl Chloride, Viton and Barrier® (>8-hr breakthrough for <b>Potassium Hydroxide</b> in <i>solution</i> )
<b>Coveralls:</b>	Tychem® BR, Responder® and TK (>8-hr breakthrough for <b>Potassium Hydroxide</b> in <i>solution</i> )
<b>Respirator:</b>	>2 mg/m <sup>3</sup> - full facepiece APR with High efficiency filters >20 mg/m <sup>3</sup> - SCBA

**HEALTH EFFECTS**

**Eyes:** Severe irritation, burns and possible eye damage

**Skin:** Irritation and severe burns

**Inhalation:** Nose, throat and lung irritation with coughing and severe shortness of breath (pulmonary edema)

Headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting

**FIRST AID AND DECONTAMINATION**

**Remove** the person from exposure.

**Quickly** brush off excess chemical from the face. Flush with large amounts of water for at least 30 minutes. Remove contact lenses, if worn. Seek medical attention immediately.

**Quickly** remove contaminated clothing. Immediately blot or brush off excess chemical and wash with amounts of soap and water. Seek medical attention immediately.

**Begin** artificial respiration if breathing has stopped and CPR if necessary.

**Transfer** promptly to a medical facility. Medical observation is recommended as symptoms may be delayed.