



CHEMICAL
SAFETY

Protect Yourself From Reproductive Disorders

What can research tell us about the effects of workplace hazards on unborn children? Unfortunately, not very much. Scientists can guess about the dangers of chemical and other hazards by testing them with laboratory animals, but they can never be certain of the effects on human beings. The very fact that we don't know all the facts about reproductive dangers means we must be especially careful to avoid them.

The Problem

Each year some 14 million workers are exposed to chemicals that may impair their reproductive systems or unborn children. Chemicals that cause damage to eggs and sperm, resulting in sterility or birth defects, are called "mutagens." Chemicals that damage the fetus in the womb, causing miscarriage, stillbirth or birth defects, are called "teratogens." Men who are exposed to mutagens on the job can become sterile if the chemicals damage their sperm. Defective sperm can cause them to father children with birth defects. But women are especially at risk for reproductive disorders, because they are born with all the eggs they will ever have, while men continually produce new sperm. And pregnant workers can expose their unborn children to hazardous contaminants. Also, women absorb contaminants more easily than men and store larger amounts of them in their bodies, for longer time periods.

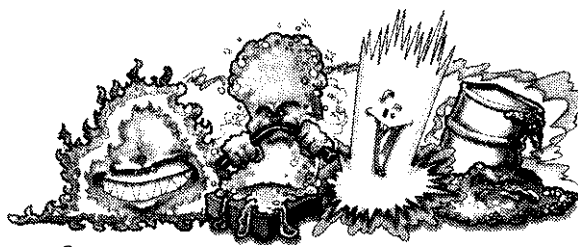
Protect Tomorrow's Children

Whether you are a man or a woman, if you're planning to have children, you have a responsibility to protect yourself from chemical exposure. Read the MSDS for each chemical you use, and be aware of company policy regarding exposure for reproductively active individuals. Even if the chemical is not known to cause reproductive disorders, make sure you are below the exposure limits by using proper protective equipment, keeping track of workplace concentrations, using ventilation and protective enclosures appropriately, and staying out of hazardous chemical areas whenever

possible. Consider transferring to a less hazardous assignment if you are pregnant or planning to become a parent soon.

Healthy children are the pride of their parents and are society's richest resource. Learn about reproductive disorders to do all you can to protect your ability to have healthy children.

What Are the Culprits?



Although any chemical that is dangerous for you is also dangerous for a fetus, there are several groups of chemicals known to cause reproductive problems. These include heavy metals, such as lead, mercury, cadmium and copper, all of which are widely used in industry. Other metals toxic to reproduction include manganese and arsenic. Although many organic solvents are suspected to cause sterility or birth defects, styrene, xylene, toluene and carbon disulfide are known to be dangerous. Other chemicals causing reproductive problems include anesthetics, gasoline additives, pesticides, ethylene oxide and chemicals used in rubber and plastics manufacture.