



Malaysian Rubber Export Promotion Council



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U.S. Department of Labor Bulletin Acknowledges **Benefits of Latex Gloves**

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) whose mission is to assure the safety and health of America's workers by setting and enforcing standards, providing training, outreach and education, establishing partnerships, and encouraging continual improvement in workplace safety and health, has published its latest Safety and Health Information Bulletin on the "Potential for Sensitization and Possible Allergic Reaction to Natural Rubber Latex Gloves and other Natural Rubber Products" on 28 February 2008.

This bulletin updates the Technical Information Bulletin from April 1999 which provided information for field personnel, employees and employers about the issue regarding sensitization and allergic reactions that have occurred in some individuals using natural rubber latex (NRL) products - particularly gloves, in an occupational setting.

Standard Malaysian Glove



POWDER-FREE

Your Choice for Quality

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While the document provides much information of latex protein allergy, conveying better understanding of the allergy issues related to latex gloves, it also acknowledges the benefits of latex gloves. It is widely accepted that certain proteins found in NRL gloves could trigger allergic reactions in latex sensitized individuals. In this new bulletin, several recent studies are quoted regarding the positive impact of using of low-protein latex gloves to dramatically reduce sensitization and a number of these reactions, such as:

"Gloves with lower protein concentration caused fewer positive responses to skin-prick tests than gloves with higher protein concentration, also, higher total protein levels found in gloves generally have included high levels of NRL allergenic proteins."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Occupational Exposure Routes)

"Use of powder-free gloves has shown to reduce the dissemination of NRL proteins into the environment and decrease the likelihood of reactions by both inhalation and dermal routes."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Recommended Strategies)

"Powder-free gloves with either lower total proteins or lower allergenic protein content reduced risk of sensitization to allergenic NRL proteins or allergic reactions in persons already sensitized."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Occupational Exposure Routes)

"Some NRL allergic employees have been able to work wearing non-latex gloves when their co-workers wore powder-free latex gloves."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Recommended Strategies)

"Benefits of a facility-wide use of only lower protein powder-free gloves (with already sensitized employees using non-latex gloves) include a decrease in cases of occupational asthma and other clinical latex allergy symptoms, and decrease in latex allergy responses confirmed by skin-prick test."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Recommended Strategies)

"Costs related to missed workdays and workers compensation claims were reduced. This suggested an overall financial benefit from this approach."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Recommended Strategies)

OSHA's blood pathogens standard (29CFR 1910.1030) requires employees to use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves, against blood and other potentially infectious materials when there is occupational exposure. OSHA recognizes that "NRL is a glove material that has been used in health care environment for barrier protection for a number of years" (SHIB 01-28-2008, Recommended Strategies), and this

bulletin reinforces its barrier protection qualities. In view of the latex protein allergy concern affecting certain sensitive individuals, OSHA recommends measures on how to reduce exposure to latex protein in work places which include:

Powder-free NRL gloves with lower-allergenic protein content as a choice for barrier protection against infectious agents if NRL gloves are used.

Employees who are allergic to latex proteins be provided with alternate suitable non-NRL gloves as their choices for use.

OSHA also comments that workers should be cautious in choosing non-latex substitutes: "Since the reason for wearing gloves is to provide barrier protection from hazardous substances, substitute materials must maintain an adequate barrier protection and be appropriate for the hazards."

(SHIB 01-28-2008, Recommended Strategies)

To further protect the allergic individuals, OSHA also recommends healthcare facilities to adopt other safety measures, such as choice of appropriate products (non-NRL alternatives/low allergen items), a safe zone where no latex products are used, and periodic screening questionnaires for NRL allergic symptoms in employees with current or past history of significant latex protein exposure.

Clearly, OSHA took a wide variety of data and reports into consideration to provide the American healthcare facilities with a more updated understanding of an allergy problem that affects certain individuals. It is noteworthy that OSHA does not prohibit the use NRL gloves. Instead, health safety measures that allow the continued use of NRL gloves in the workplace are provided.

To view the entire SHIB 01-28-2008 bulletin, please visit <http://www.osha.gov>

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which makes recommendations with regard to health and safety of medical devices, holds a similar position. FDA recommends labeling of all medical devices that contain natural rubber latex as a caution to sensitive individuals. While the FDA has also considered proposal to limit the amount of proteins and powder in NRL gloves, this proposal appears not to be necessary since today's medical gloves made from latex contain much lower protein and powder content than in the past. In fact, the proposal was not included in the recent FDA's Medical Glove Guidance Manual for medical gloves to be marketed in the U.S., which was published in January 2008.

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