

Introduction

This Pamphlet answers commonly asked questions about the hazards from exposure to methylene chloride. It also describes approaches to controlling methylene chloride exposure during the most common furniture stripping processes. Although these approaches were developed and field tested by NIOSH, each setting requires custom installation because of the different air flow interferences at each site.

What is the Stripping Solution Base?

The most common active ingredient in paint removers is a chemical called methylene chloride. Methylene chloride is present in the paint

remover to penetrate, blister, and finally lift the old finish. Other chemicals in paint removers work to accelerate the stripping process, to retard evaporation, and to act as thickening agents. These other ingredients may include: methanol, toluene, acetone, or paraffin.¹

Is Methylene Chloride Bad for Me?

Exposure to methylene chloride may cause short-term health effects or long-term health effects.

Short-Term (acute) Health Effects

Exposure to high levels of paint removers over short periods of time can cause irritation to the skin, eyes, mucous membranes, and respiratory tract. Other symptoms of high

exposure are dizziness, headache, and lack of coordination. The occurrence of any of these symptoms indicates that you are being exposed to high levels of the methylene chloride. At the onset of any of these symptoms, you should leave the work area, get some fresh air, and determine why the levels were high.

A portion of inhaled methylene chloride is converted by the body to carbon monoxide, which can lower the blood's ability to carry oxygen. When the solvent is used properly, however, the levels of carbon monoxide should not be hazardous. Individuals with cardiovascular or pulmonary health problems should check with their physician before using the paint stripper. Individuals experiencing severe symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest pains should obtain proper medical care immediately.²

Long-term (Chronic) Health Effects

Methylene chloride has been shown to cause cancer in certain laboratory animal tests. The available human studies do not provide the necessary information to determine whether methylene chloride causes cancer in humans. However, as a result of the animal studies, methylene chloride is

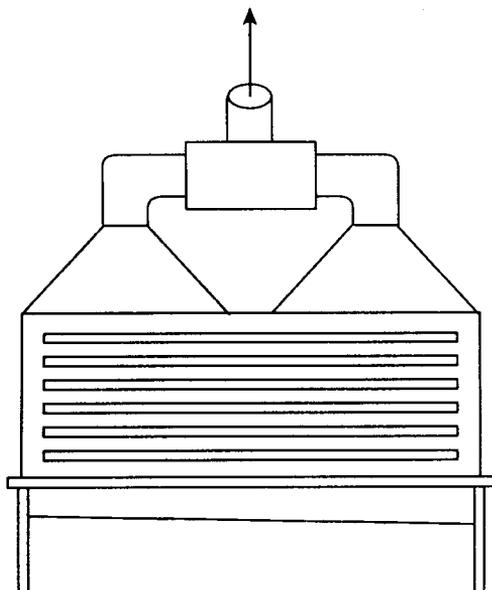


Figure 1 — Slot Hood

