Safety in dry cleaning

The following information highlights some of the dangers and risks that might exist in your premises. It is not a complete list, and the dangers will vary depending on your own particular business.

Main types of risk

Dry-cleaning machines

The most significant danger is exposure to solvent fumes from the cleaning process.

- There needs to be mechanical ventilation around the machine. Natural ventilation is not enough. If the machine has its own ventilation system, this will probably be enough.
- Do not overload the machine.
- Do not add solvent during a cleaning cycle.
- Do not remove items from the machine that are wet with solvent.
- Before adding more solvent check that there is enough space in the tank for it.
- Follow the maker's instructions when cleaning out the still.
- Do not clean the button trap or lint filter when the machine is being used.
- Make sure workers know how to switch off the machine in an emergency.

Other equipment: scissor presses, polished head presses, cabinet presses, steam air formers, hand irons, lifts and hoists. There is a risk that people may trap their fingers and come into contact with hot surfaces.

- Make sure that you provide and maintain guards.
- Carry out regular inspections and tests of emergency stop controls (such as buttons, pressure mats and trip bars).
- Flexible electric leads should be heat and abrasive resistant.

Health effects - solvents

Inhaling solvent vapours above the safe limits may cause headaches, extreme tiredness, light-headedness, nausea (feeling sick) and other effects. High concentrations can cause people to fall unconscious and even die.

- Do not eat, drink or smoke near solvents.
- Do not carry or leave solvents in an open container.
- Get rid of contaminated solvent waste from the still safely.
- Do not use solvents to clean your hands.
- Provide good toilet and washing facilities including hot and cold running water.

Other chemicals

It may be dangerous to use spotting chemicals, hydrofluoric acid, dyes and filter powder (silica).

- Suppliers provide detailed health and safety guidance on how to use their products, usually in the form of data sheets.
- All chemicals should be assessed under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations. See the separate sheet on COSHH.
- Staff should be trained so that they are aware of the possible dangers, follow the correct methods of use and know the correct emergency procedures if an accident happens.

Solvent leaks and spills

Spillages of solvent can lead to fumes building up and the risk of fire.

- Check for liquid and vapour leaks every day.
- Keep records of the type and amount of each solvent that is used and investigate any sharp increases in the amount of each solvent that is used.

- **Major spillages** - You should deal with spillages of hot 'perc', major spillages of cold perc and all spillages of refrigerant trichlorotrifluoroethane commonly called R113 solvent by evacuating the premises. You may need to call the fire brigade.
- **Minor spillages** (up to two litres) of cold 'perc' (perchloroethylene) can be mopped up using a special spillage blanket or using items that are waiting to be dry cleaned. These can be put straight into the machine for cleaning or kept in a polythene bag until they can be put in the machine. If you do not need outside help, then:
  - shut down the machine and turn off the solvent pumps;
  - turn off the heat source to the machine and check that the cooling system is working;
  - check all ventilation is working and open all doors and windows;
  - leave the area and wait for the fumes to clear; and
  - have a second person nearby when entering the premises again.

For more information
Textile Services Association Ltd (TSA), phone: 0208 863 7755, fax: 0208 861 2115
Fabric Care Research Association (FCRA), phone: 01423 885977, fax: 01423 880045
Drycleaners: Are you in control? INDG 310 available on HSE's website at www.hse.gov.uk