

List floor-finishing hazards on site

Explain dangers

Workers have been killed and critically injured when they apply coatings to floors in basements and other enclosed areas. Hazards include flash fires, explosions, and asphyxiation.

Most coatings contain petroleum products that are extremely flammable. Applying these coatings with a spray or roller can create an explosive atmosphere.

Some coatings may contain isocyanates which can cause respiratory sensitization and asthma.

Many floor coatings, adhesives, and sealants are also toxic. They can cause asphyxiation. This means that your body can't get enough oxygen to survive.

There are two causes:

- Oxygen in the air you breathe has been reduced by the products you're using.
- The products have poisoned your blood so that it can't carry oxygen through your body.
- Asphyxiation can make you lose consciousness and die.

Identify controls

WHMIS

WHMIS is your first line of defence. This is the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System.

Read the WHMIS label on the coating, sealant, or other product you're using. It will explain the steps you must follow to avoid trouble.

More information is available in the material safety data sheet—the MSDS—that comes along with floor-finishing products.

Fire

Because most floor-finishing products are flammable, make sure that any ignition sources in the work area are turned off.

Never smoke when applying floor coatings. Air contaminated by coatings can also be ignited by pilot lights on gas appliances or furnaces and sparks from electric switches.

Ventilation

When laying or finishing floors in residential basements, test, ventilate, and monitor.

Test—make sure that the basement atmosphere is not toxic, oxygen-deficient, oxygen-enriched, or flammable. Testing should be done by someone competent to use appropriate testing equipment.

Ventilate—open doors and windows and, if necessary, use fans to exhaust and clear the air.

Monitor—Keep testing the atmosphere as long as people are working there.

Demonstrate

With your crew, review the information on the label and MSDS for a coating or other product you typically use on the job.