



## Fumes and Gases

### INTRODUCTION

Many welding, cutting, and allied processes produce fumes and gases, which may be harmful to your health.

### DEFINITION

- Fumes are solid particles which originate from welding consumables, the base metal, and any coatings present on the base metal.
  - In addition to shielding gases that may be used, gases are produced during the welding process or may be produced by the effects of process radiation on the surrounding environment.
  - Acquaint yourself with the effects of these fumes and gases by reading the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) for all materials used (consumables, base metals, coatings, and cleaners).
  - For help, consult a recognized specialist in Industrial Hygiene or Environmental Services.
  - The amount and composition of these fumes and gases depend upon the composition of the filler metal and base material, welding process, current level, arc length, and other factors.
- Depending on material involved ranges from irritation of eyes, skin, and respiratory system to more severe complications.
  - Effects may occur immediately or at some later time.
  - Fumes can cause symptoms such as nausea, headaches, dizziness, and metal fume fever.
  - The possibility of more serious health effects exists when highly toxic materials are involved. For example, manganese overexposure can affect the central nervous system resulting in impaired speech and movement.
  - In confined spaces the gases might displace breathing air and cause asphyxiation.

### HOW TO AVOID OVEREXPOSURE

- Keep your head out of the fumes.
- Do not breathe the fumes.
- Use enough ventilation or exhaust at the arc, or both, to keep fumes and gases from your breathing zone and general area.
- In some cases, natural air movement provides enough ventilation and fresh air.

### POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF OVER-EXPOSURE

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- Where ventilation is questionable, use air sampling to determine the need for corrective measures.
- Use mechanical ventilation to improve air quality.
- If engineering controls are not feasible, use an approved respirator.
- Work in a confined space only if it is well ventilated, or while wearing an air-supplied respirator. Fumes from welding or cutting and oxygen depletion can alter air quality causing injury or death. Be sure the breathing air is safe.
- Follow OSHA guidelines for permissible exposure limits (PELs) for various fumes.
- Follow the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists recommendations for threshold limit values (TLVs) for fumes and gases.
- Have a recognized specialist in Industrial Hygiene or Environmental Services check the operation and air quality and make recommendations for the specific welding or cutting situation.

American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). *Threshold Limit Values for Chemical Substances and Physical Agents and Biological Exposure Indices*, available from ACGIH, 1330 Kemper Meadow Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45240-1634 (telephone: 513-742-2020; web site: [www.acgih.org](http://www.acgih.org)).

American Welding Society (AWS). *Fumes and Gases in the Welding Environment* and other welding related safety and health publications, available from Global Engineering Documents, 15 Inverness Way East, Englewood, CO 80112-5776 (telephone: 800-854-7179; web site: [www.global.ihs.com](http://www.global.ihs.com)).

Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). *Code of Federal Regulations*, Title 30 Mineral Resources, Parts 1 to 199, available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954 (telephone: 202-693-9400; web site: [www.msha.gov](http://www.msha.gov)).

For specific information, refer to the applicable Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) available from the manufacturer, distributor, or supplier.

TLV is a registered trademark of the ACGIH.

## INFORMATION SOURCES

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). *Code of Federal Regulations*, Title 29 Labor, Parts 1910.1 to 1910.1450, available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954 (telephone: 800-321-6742; web site: [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)).

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