Cement burns toolbox talk

Health · about 5 minutes · read it out, or say it in your own words

SITE OR JOB	DATE	PRESENTER

Mixing mortar, casting slabs, plastering and screeding put cement on hands, knees and feet every day on a South African site. Wet cement is strongly alkaline and can cause deep chemical burns when it is trapped against the skin, often without pain until the damage is done, and it is a common cause of dermatitis that can end a bricklayer's or plasterer's career.

SAY THIS

Cement is a chemical

We handle cement so often that we forget it is a chemical. Wet cement, mortar, concrete and plaster are strongly alkaline, the opposite of acid but just as harsh on skin. If wet cement sits against your skin, it slowly burns it. Because it does not sting at first, people only notice hours later, when the skin is red, blistered or raw. Serious cement burns can need hospital treatment and skin grafts.

Where burns happen

Most burns happen where cement gets trapped: inside a boot after wading in a pour, under a glove that let cement in at the cuff, on knees after kneeling on a wet screed, and under a wet sleeve or a watch strap. Cement-soaked clothing pressed against the skin all day is just as bad.

Keep it off your skin

Wear waterproof gloves that suit cement work, long enough that cement does not get in at the top. Wear gumboots high enough for the job when you stand in wet concrete, with your trousers over the top of the boots, not tucked in. Use knee pads or a kneeling board for screeding, and keep your sleeves down. Use long-handled tools so you are further from the mix.

Wash it off quickly

If wet cement gets on your skin, wash it off with clean water as soon as you can. Do not wait for break time. If it gets inside your boots, gloves or clothing, stop, take them off, wash your skin and change into clean, dry clothes. Wash your hands and arms before eating and at the end of the day. Dirty water from the mixer drum is not clean water.

Eyes and dry powder

Cement splashes and powder in the eye can cause a chemical burn. Wear safety glasses or goggles when mixing, pouring, tipping bags and chipping. If cement gets in someone's eye, rinse it straight away with lots of clean running water or the eyewash, and do not rub it. Keep rinsing for at least 20 minutes and get medical help. When you open or tip bags, stand upwind and avoid breathing the dust.

Watch your skin

Dry, cracked, itchy or red hands that get worse with cement work can be dermatitis. Once you become allergic to cement it can last for life. Tell the supervisor early. Any burn, blister or skin that looks raw after cement work needs first aid and should be seen by a clinic or doctor; tell them it was wet cement.

CHECK ON SITE TODAY

- [ ] Who is mixing, pouring, plastering or screeding today, and do they all have waterproof gloves and gumboots?
- [ ] Is there clean water, soap and somewhere to wash near the mixing area, separate from the mixer water?
- [ ] Is the eyewash or a supply of clean water for eyes close to where we mix and pour?
- [ ] Are knee pads or kneeling boards available for screeding and floor work?
- [ ] Does anyone have sore, cracked or red skin on their hands or legs from earlier work?

ASK THE CREW

- ? Have you or someone you worked with ever had a cement burn? How did it happen?
- ? Why do people end up with cement inside their boots, and how do we stop it?
- ? Where is the nearest clean water if you get cement in your eye right now?
- ? What makes it hard to keep gloves on when you are plastering or laying bricks?

PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR THIS JOB

Waterproof gloves suitable for alkaline cement work, with long or close-fitting cuffs · Gumboots high enough for the pour, trousers worn over the boots · Waterproof knee pads or a kneeling board for screeding · Safety glasses or goggles when mixing, pouring and handling bags · Long sleeves and long trousers

THE LAW

General Safety Regulations, 1986, regulation 2: Personal safety equipment and facilities; Construction Regulations, 2014, regulation 30: Construction employees' facilities. What each one says, in plain words, with links: sitediary.co.za/toolbox-talks/cement-burns/

Toolbox talk attendance register

TOPIC

Wet cement and concrete burns

DATE

SITE OR JOB

TIME

PRESENTER

COMPANY

PRESENTER SIGNATURE

By signing, I confirm that I attended this toolbox talk, that it was given in a language I understand, and that I could ask questions.

NO.	NAME AND SURNAME	COMPANY OR TRADE	SIGNATURE
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Keep this register in the site health and safety file. Log the talk in today's site diary with a photo of this page.