

Helbredsmæssige aspekter af glasfiber

I den danske kompositbranche anvendes kontinuerlige e-glasfibre, i daglig tale "glasfiber", til armering af plast (f.eks. polyester, vinylester, epoxy m.m.).

Generelt gælder, at glasfiber til brug for armering af plast ikke er sundhedsskadeligt.

Nedenstående er et sammendrag af en udgivelse fra **APFE** (European Glass Fibre producers Association), omhandlende kontinuerlige glasfibre og disses sundhedsmæssige aspekter (hele den originale engelske version af artiklen er efterfølgende vedlagt).

Inhalation

Risikoen for at inhalerer glasfibre der kan forårsage en sundhedsfare, afhænger af disses "respirabilitet", dvs. deres evne til at trænge ned i de nedre lunger. Fibre med en diameter større end 3 µm trænger IKKE ned i de nedre lunger og udgør derfor IKKE en sundhedsrisiko for alvorlige lungesygdomme. Da filamentdiametere for glasfiber generelt er større end 10 µm er disse altså IKKE respirable, og kan derfor IKKE udgøre en sundhedsrisiko. (Ifølge WHO "s definition skal fibre have en diameter mindre end 3 µm for at være respirable. Selv efter forarbejdning af glasfiber vil diameteren på det fineste støv være signifikant større end 3 µm).

De fleste regler og studier vedrørende "respirable" fibre, gælder ikke for kontinuerlige glasfilamenter til armering af plast, men derimod for glasULD til isolering, som IKKE er det samme som glasFIBER, da produktionsmetoderne ved fremstilling af hhv. glasuld og glasfiber er helt forskellige og intet har tilfælles med hinanden!

F.eks.

- Grænseværdien for koncentrationen af glasfibre i luften (1,5 fibre/cm³) er fastsat i det franske arbejdsministeriums cirkulære nr. 95/04 dateret 12/01/1995 (som tillæg til cirkulære dateret 19/07/1982), men **gælder ikke for glasfibre til armering af plast.**
- Risikoindekset for cancer KI defineret i Tyskland ved TRGS 905 **gælder ikke for kontinuerlige ikke-respirable glasfibre.**
- Ingen af de epidemiologiske studier og laboratorieundersøgelser, der er foretaget indtil dato, viser nogen videnskabelig signifikant risiko for, at cancer kan opstå fra glasfibre til armering af plast.

Studier foretaget ved injektion af glasfibre i bughinden har aldrig vist nogle risici for at fremkalde cancer i lunger eller lungehinder, men indikerer begrænset risiko i bughulen. Disse undersøgelser har ingen sammenhæng med måden, hvorunder glasfibre normalt forbruges.

Irritation

Selvom glasfibre ikke er direkte sundhedsskadelige, kan de forårsage *irritation*. Denne irritation er rent *mekanisk og midlertidig*. Irritationen forsvinder, når påvirkningen ophører. Irritationen kan påvirke hud og øjne, såvel som de øvre åndedrætsorganer.

Man er stødt på enkelte allergiproblemer. Alle blandinger af sizings er testet for allergiske reaktioner i de fugtige omgivelser under produktionen på glasfiberfabrikkerne, hvorfor der kun anvendes sizings, når disse er under den laveste allergi-grænse.

Arbejdspraksis

For at undgå irritation ved arbejde med glasfiber, anbefales det at følge de retningslinier man finder i leverandørbrugsanvisningerne for de forskellige glasfiber råvarer. Ved at følge disse anvisninger (f.eks. brug af hansker, lange ærmer og bukser, støvmasker etc.) kan man let undgå de ovenfor beskrevne mekaniske og midlertidige irritationer.

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Continuous Filament Glass Fibre and Human Health

SUMMARY

Continuous filament glass fibres produced by GlassFibreEurope member companies have diameters greater than 6 microns. These fibres therefore have diameters above the respirable range of 3 microns or less, thus minimising the potential for any chronic pulmonary effects associated with exposure to these fibres.

Customers can confirm the diameter of the fibre that they purchase from their supplier. The irritation possibly caused by these fibres is a simple mechanical one, which can be minimised by good industrial hygiene practices.

Manufacturers and their customers should continue to use recognised safety and health practices to ensure safe use of our products. Work practices and procedures should be in place to minimise dust generation. Local exhaust ventilation should be used if necessary to minimise and/or keep airborne dust levels at or below recommended limits. A government approved dust respirator should be used if airborne concentrations exceed regulatory and recommended limits, if irritation occurs or if the workers choose to do so for personal comfort. Exposure assessments should be conducted, as appropriate, to ensure exposures are within recommended limits.

CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

Glass fibre has been commercially manufactured and marketed for more than 60 years. During this time, it has become one of the world's most useful and beneficial man-made materials.

While it has numerous uses and applications, glass fibre is generally produced in two basic forms: wool-type fibres, referred to most commonly as glass wool or glass fibre insulation, and continuous filament glass fibres, produced in long, continuous strands or filaments.

Continuous Filament Glass Fibre Products and Applications

Continuous filament glass fibre is produced and supplied in a variety of forms: roving, chopped strand, yarn, mat, fabric, tissue, etc. The main end-use is the reinforcement of thermosetting and thermoplastic resins. These composites are used in a wide variety of applications.

The main markets for composite materials are the automotive and transport sectors, the electrical/electronics industry and the building industry. Other markets include pipes and tanks, agricultural equipment, industrial machinery, wind-turbine blades and the sports, leisure and marine sectors. The second most important end-use is the manufacture of textiles that are used in similar markets to composites though clearly for different applications. The main market for glass textiles in the electronics industry is in the production of printed wiring boards.

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Man-Made (Synthetic) Vitreous Fibres (MMVF / SVF)

Glass fibre is categorised within a group of man-made materials historically referred to as man-made mineral fibres (MMMF). However, a more appropriate name is man-made vitreous fibres (MMVFs) or synthetic vitreous fibres (SVFs), reflecting the glassy, non-crystalline nature of the material. Glass fibres are made from molten sand and other inorganic materials under highly controlled conditions.

Composition of Continuous Filament Glass fibre

The predominant glass composition for continuous filament glass fibre is known as E-glass. It accounts for almost all the world's production of these glass fibres. E-glass is a member of the family calcium-aluminium-silicate glasses.

Boron is generally a major element of E-glass, sodium and potassium are maintained at low levels to give acceptable electrical properties. In recent years, alternative E-glass formulations, without boron have been developed that can be used in most applications, except for printed wiring boards or aerospace applications.

For some applications requiring specific properties, e.g. high mechanical strength, higher temperature resistance, improved resistance to corrosion, resistance to alkali in cement, high dielectric properties, other glass families like C, D, R, AR and S are also produced as continuous filament glass fibres.

Manufacturing continuous filament glass fibre

Glass fibres are a high technology product. Continuous filament glass fibre is produced by a continuous drawing process through the calibrated holes of bushings at constant speed, thus leading to a very narrow variation in filament diameter.

In any given product, the diameter of the fibres does not differ much from the mean or nominal diameter. Standard deviation of the diameter in continuous filament products is typically less than 10% of the nominal diameter. The typical diameter of continuous filament glass fibre products manufactured by GlassFibreEurope Member companies ranges from greater than 6 to 25 microns with the majority of the products being 9 microns or larger in diameter.

Another characteristic of the manufacturing process is that it gives a parallel orientation to the continuous filaments constituting the fibre bundles.

Further processing of continuous filament products does not generate any change in diameter, nor in the parallel orientation of filament bundles.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ASPECTS OF CONTINUOUS FILAMENT GLASS FIBRE

Inhalation

Airborne dust of continuous filament can be inhaled. However, the potential for inhaled glass fibre to cause any health hazard depends on its "respirability", i.e. its potential to enter the lower regions of the lung. Indeed, the essential feature of a health and safety assessment for the product is to determine whether it is possible for the product to cause lung disease through respiration.

According to the WHO definition, respirable fibres have a diameter (d) smaller than 3 microns, a length (l) larger than 5 microns and a l/d- ratio larger than or equal to 3. Fibres with diameters greater than 3 microns, which is the case for continuous filament glass fibre, do not reach the lower respiratory tract and, therefore have no possibility of causing serious pulmonary disease.

Continuous filament glass fibres do not possess cleavage planes which would allow them to split length-wise into fibres with smaller diameters, rather they break across the fibre, resulting in fibres which are of the same diameter as the original fibre with a shorter length and a small amount of dust.

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Recent microscopic examination of dust from highly chopped and pulverised glass demonstrated the presence of small amounts of respirable dust particles. Among these respirable particles, some were fibre-like in terms of l/d ratio (so-called "shards"). To the eye, however, it can be clearly seen that they are not regular shaped fibres but irregular shaped particles with fibre-like dimensions. To the best of our knowledge, the exposure levels of these fibre-like dust particles measured in the GlassFibreEurope member companies' manufacturing plants are of the order of magnitude between 50 to 1000 below existing applicable limits.

Irritation

On the other hand, glass fibres indeed can cause a purely mechanical irritation (itching) of the skin and eyes. This is definitely not an allergic reaction.

This has been confirmed by the 1st ATP of the Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) regulation 790/2009, which applies to man-made mineral fibre. Only glass wool or rock wool in certain circumstances and refractory ceramic fibres are concerned by this labelling. Continuous filament glass fibres are not.

When sufficient amounts of continuous filament glass fibres are released into the air during manufacture and handling, some workers may experience temporary upper respiratory tract irritation. Like skin irritation, upper respiratory irritation is a mechanical reaction to the fibres. It is not an allergic reaction and the irritation generally does not persist. Such exposures to high concentrations of airborne fibres may result in temporary coughing and/or sneezing. These effects will subside after the worker is removed from exposure, and should have no further impact on his or her health or well being.

By respecting the manufacturers' Safe Use and handling instructions, these mechanical effects can readily be avoided.

As a general rule, the mechanical irritation caused by glass fibres disappears when the person is no longer exposed to the product.

Human Epidemiology Studies

An important method for assessing the effects of a substance on humans is through epidemiological studies. Such studies typically examine large groups of people who have been exposed to the substance being studied.

Two major studies involving 21500 workers in the USA and Europe, conducted respectively by the University of Pittsburgh (School of Public Health) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), showed no increase in lung cancer or non-malignant respiratory disease among persons working in glass fibre production. A smaller study was conducted among workers in a continuous filament glass fibre manufacturing facility in Canada with the same results.

Three epidemiological studies have been published recently on cohorts of people working in MMVF factories. The first one in Europe by Boffetta (1997) on different types of MMVF concluded for two plants in Northern Ireland and Italy that there was no significant increase of different types of cancer compared to reference cohorts. The two other studies by Chiazzo were specifically made in one plant producing continuous filament glass fibre in the USA. Chiazzo (1997) concluded that there was no evidence of excess of cancer in the populations working in this plant for a long time (more than 15 years). References are mentioned below.

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Animal Studies

In 2000 the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) in Edinburgh Scotland published the results of a long-term animal inhalation study on respirable micro-fibres in the scientific journal *Inhalation Toxicology*. In the IOM study, the micro-fibres utilized were respirable with a mean diameter of 0.5 microns. The laboratory animals were exposed to an extremely high concentration (1022 respirable fibres per cubic centimetre of air (f/cc) for five hours per day, seven days a week for 52 weeks) of these special application E-glass micro-fibres (not produced by GlassFibreEurope members). Exposure to the respirable micro-fibres at a very high exposure concentration resulted in the development of fibrosis, lung and pulmonary tumors. The level of airborne respirable fibres used in the study was 100,000 times higher than fibre levels typically measured in our continuous filament manufacturing operations.

Classification and Regulatory Aspects

In recent years, several major reviews have been undertaken by various expert international organizations on the health and safety aspects of glass fibres. The first of these was conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in 1987. The purpose of the IARC review was to determine whether these fibres are carcinogenic to humans. At that time, IARC concluded that continuous filament glass fibres are not classifiable as to their carcinogenicity to humans (IARC classification Group 3). In October 2001, after a comprehensive review of more recent human epidemiology and animal toxicity data, IARC concluded that the classification of continuous filament glass fibres in Group 3 is appropriate, confirming that there is currently no evidence for the carcinogenicity of continuous filament glass fibres to humans (IARC Monograph Man-Made Vitreous Fibres Vol. 81, 2002).

IARC groups man-made vitreous fibres (MMVF) into categories based on raw materials, production process and end use. IARC noted, in its 2001 reclassification of MMVFs, that an additional category had been added to group those durable glass fibres produced by flame attenuation for special applications. IARC retained the Group 2B classification for what IARC termed "Special Purpose Fibres." IARC gave as examples of these SPF: E and 475 respirable glass fibres. IARC retained the Group 3 classification for continuous filament fibres, regardless of chemical composition. Continuous filament fibres differ from Special Purpose Fibres in their method of manufacture and end use. They may also have different composition. Thus, continuous filament E-glass fibres should not be confused with SPF E-glass fibres and are still classified as Group 3.

Environment Canada also completed a review of the scientific data for glass fibres. The purpose of the review was to assess both the hazards of glass fibres and the risk to humans and the environment presented by those fibres. It concluded for continuous filament glass fibres:

"Based principally on the likelihood that few respirable fibres are generated in the production and use of continuous filament and that concentrations in the general environment should be extremely small, it has been concluded that continuous glass filament is not entering the environment in quantities or under conditions that may constitute a danger in Canada to human life or health".

The American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) has classified continuous filament glass fibres as not classifiable as human carcinogen. The ACGIH has established a TLV (Threshold Limit Value or recommended exposure limit) for glass fibre of 1 fibre per cubic centimetre of air for respirable fibres and 5 mg per cubic meter of air for inhalable glass fibre dust. These levels were established to prevent mechanical irritation of the upper airways. IARC, NTP (US National Toxicology Program) and OSHA (US Occupational Safety and Health Administration) do not list continuous filament glass fibres as a carcinogen.

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Inorganic chemicals in dust form, which hold as (suspected) carcinogens, are classified as Class III under the German TA-Luft regulation. The TLV mass concentration in air for these is 5 mg/m³. In the German MAK values list the criteria for carcinogenicity for fibres are listed. These can be found under Chapter III 'Carcinogenic Industrial Chemicals' Paragraph 'Fibredust' (Faserstaub). The above criteria for carcinogenicity are as follows:

length/diameter ratio larger than 3, length larger than 5 µm, diameter smaller than 3 µm.

Continuous filament glass fibre as produced by GlassFibreEurope member companies does not conform to these criteria. All GlassFibreEurope produced continuous filament glass fibre types have a diameter larger than 3 µm and hence are **not** to be considered as (suspected) carcinogens under the definitions of the German MAK values list. The so-called KI-index which reflects a risk assessment of respirable fibres based on their composition, does **not** apply to continuous filament glass fibre as produced by the GlassFibreEurope member companies.

Continuous filament glass fibres are not considered as a dangerous substance following the rules of the European CLP regulation and its subsequent amendments. This has been confirmed by the 1st ATP of the CLP regulation 790/2009 on Man-made Mineral Fibre where continuous filament glass fibres are not to be labelled either for toxicity, carcinogenicity or irritation. Labelling is only applicable to glass or rock wool in certain circumstances and refractory ceramic fibres.

Industry Recommended Work Practices

While continuous filament glass fibres are safe to manufacture and handle, a number of general work practices should nevertheless be followed by those who are involved with these operations. Besides preventive measures aiming to reduce the possibilities of generating dust or broken filaments, a series of protective measures in areas of high exposure are recommended: gloves, long sleeves, long legged trousers, respiratory masks especially for workers involved in cutting operations, cleaning or discharging of containers. It is furthermore recommended to measure as appropriate the number of fibres in the air to prevent high exposure levels to fibre or dust, in order to ensure compliance with existing exposure limits.

Years of airborne fibre sampling at GlassFibreEurope manufacturing facilities confirm that very low concentrations of respirable fibres may be present, but the concentrations are well below current recommended exposure limits. GlassFibreEurope will continue to conduct exposure monitoring to ensure proper work practices, engineering controls and personal protective equipment (PPE) are in place to eliminate or minimise exposure risk.

GlassFibreEurope product information will continue to be reviewed and updated as needed based upon the evaluation of work by different laboratories studying these subjects and the ongoing analysis of our products.

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MEMBERS REFERENCES

3B the fibreglass company
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY Centre
Route de Charneux, 59
B – 4651 BATTICE
Belgium

Product Certification Leader
Mr. Yves BODEUX
tel. +32 87 692 497
fax +32 87 675 110
e-mail : yves.bodeux@3b-fibreglass.com
www.3b-fibreglass.com

AHLSTROM OYJ
Building and Energy / Glassfibre
Ahlstromintie 19, P.O.B. 18
FIN – 48601 KARHULA
Finland

Quality & HSE Manager
tel. +358 10 888 11
fax.+358 10 888 2510
e-mail : glassfibre@ahlstrom.com
www.ahlstrom.com

LANXESS Deutschland GmbH
Business Unit SCP Glass Fibre
Building G17, Room 315
D – 41539 DORMAGEN
Germany

Contact & Customer Support
tel. +49 700 45 27 73 42
fax. +49 2133 51 29 990
e-mail : glassfiber@lanxess.com
www.glassfiber.lanxess.com

JOHNS MANVILLE Europe GmbH
Max-Fischer-Straße, 11
D - 86399 BOBINGEN
Germany

European Product Stewardship Manager
tel. +49 8234 9670 535
fax. +49 8234 9670 558
e-mail : jean-cecil.schneider@jm.com
www.jm.com

**Owens Corning /
OCV Reinforcements**
767 quai des Allobroges, BP 929
73009 Chambéry Cédex
France

Product Certification Leader
tel: +33 479 75 53 00
fax: +33 479 75 54 03
e-mail: jacqueline.buffer@owenscorning.com
www.ovcreinforcements.com

P-D GLASSEIDEN GmbH OSCHATZ
Wellerswalder Weg, 17
D – 04758 OSCHATZ
Germany

R & D Department
tel. +49 3435 657 404
fax. +49 3435 622 447
e-mail: k.kittler@glasseide-oschatz.de
www.glasseide-oschatz.de

PPG Industries Fibre Glass Europe
Department Technical Services EHS
Postbus 50
NL – 9600 AB HOOGEZAND
Netherlands

Customer H. & S. support - Europe
tel. +31 598 313 911
fax. +31 598 399 649
e-mail : ppghoogezand@ppg.com
www.ppg.com

SAINT-GOBAIN Technical Fabrics
517, avenue de la Boisse
73000 Chambéry Cedex - France

Ms. Agnès Puech, EHS Coordinateur
tel.: +33 (0)432500970
fax: +33 (0)432500931
E-mail : agnes.puech@saint-gobain.com
www.SGTF.COM