

“Biocides are useful, but they must be used with caution and knowledge”



In the cleaning sector, closed circuit biocides are used on a daily basis – think, for instance, of disinfectants. However, this does not reduce the risk they pose to human health. Guy Vaes, workplace health and safety expert at IDEWE, and Nicole Nys, district manager at cleaning company ISS, explain how you can deal with closed circuit biocides in a safe manner in a cleaning company and what your obligations are.

Biocides are pesticides. They are used to deter or destroy harmful organisms, ranging from bacteria and viruses to moulds and vermin. “Cleaning companies may be less familiar with the term biocides, but they use those chemicals every day,” explains Nicole Nys, district manager at ISS. “Examples are chlorine tablets, disinfectant sprays or disinfectants based on alcohol or quaternary ammonium salts. These are all biocides that are mainly used to thoroughly disinfect floors, walls, equipment, etc.”

Such biocides pose a high risk to health. They belong to the ‘closed circuit’. They can be toxic, carcinogenic or harmful to reproduction. That is why it is mandatory to wear personal protective equipment when you use such biocides. Guy Vaes, workplace health and safety expert at IDEWE, an external service for health and safety in the workplace: “The list of authorised biocides can be found on the website www.biocide.be of the Federal Public Service Public Health. It clearly states which biocides belong to the closed circuit and which ones do not.”

“When I work with biocides, I always wear gloves”

KARIN SAS, SITE MANAGER AT
DIEST GENERAL HOSPITAL

As a site manager at Diest General Hospital, Karin Sas comes into contact with biocides on a daily basis. “I prepare the cleaning products for the cleaning team. When I work with biocides, I always wear gloves. For example, when I dilute a concentrated disinfectant with water and then dip microfibre cloths in it. When there is a risk of splashing, I also wear protective goggles. The team that works with the biocides I prepare is also accustomed to working with gloves on.”



“At our work place, constant attention is paid to personal safety and hygiene. Each new cleaner receives a short training from the cleaning company. This way, they become familiar with the products they will be using and with the safety risks and the protection measures. If they later have doubts about the correct use of a product, they can check the safety cards in the room where the cleaning utensils are stored. In areas where a specific procedure needs to be followed, these have been put up as well. A good cleaning company does not only focus on safety and hygiene at the customer’s premises, but also on the well-being of its own employees.”



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HILDE NYS, DISTRICT MANAGER AT ISS

Mandatory registration

If you want to use a closed circuit biocide, you have to register as a professional user at www.biocide.be and confirm this status each year. “For companies active in the cleaning sector it is not always clear who exactly is required to register. They or their customers?” Nicole Nys notes. “The rule is: anyone who buys or uses closed circuit biocides must register as a user. We clean places such as hospitals, residential and care centres, industrial food companies and schools. It is often the client who buys closed circuit biocides, sometimes in consultation with us. And we use the products. So we both have to register.”

“It is the duty of the employer of the cleaning company to keep close track of this registration,” Guy Vaes agrees. “It is also the employer’s duty to ensure its employees’ well-being and to provide a safe and healthy work environment. The employer has to identify what risks are posed by hazardous substances, what measures he/she can take to reduce those risks, and what kind of protective clothing he/she needs to provide. For example, are corrosive products used? Then be aware that these can cause irritation or burns when they come into contact with the skin or the eyes, and have your employees wear gloves. You can read how to use the products properly on the safety data sheets.”

In addition, the employer must see to it that biocides are only used for the applications for which they are authorised. These applications are mentioned in the authorisation act of the product or possibly in the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC), both of which can be found in the list of authorised biocides at www.biocide.be.

Good hygiene

In order to work with hazardous substances in a safe manner, good hygiene is just as important. “Especially when you work at places where there are a lot of people around or where food is prepared,” Nicole Nys points out. “Therefore, we remind our staff to wash or disinfect their hands carefully, to wear clean clothes every day, to leave each room clean and tidy, etcetera. This way, we do not only prevent germs or bacteria from being spread, but also harmful or irritating substances. It is indisputable that biocides are useful, but you need to use them with care and knowledge – for your own health, that of your colleagues, and the environment.”

The FPS Public Health informs

Want to know more about the safe use of closed circuit biocides, the risks involved or the obligation to register? You can find plenty of information on www.biocide.be.

You can also find brochures and information sheets adapted to the cleaning sector:

- **Biocides in the cleaning sector. What do you need to know as a professional user?** (for the employer/prevention advisor)
- **Working safely with cleaning products Biocides: recognise them and protect yourself!** (for cleaning staff)



BIOCIDES?
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the necessary
caution

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