

# Safety Alert

## FUMES & ODOURS

Issue Date: 04 August 2017

### Context:

RMIT has noted an increase in incidents and complaints relating to fumes and odours caused by contractor works. Products such as paints, adhesives and sealants, may be toxic and/or have very high odours. If not handled correctly, this can have a negative health effect on workers, as well as impacting air quality for RMIT staff, students, contractors and visitors. Even when not harmful these types of odours and fumes can cause anxiety.

**Such occurrences have the potential to cause health risk and adversely impacted RMIT operations.  
All of these incidents were avoidable!**

### Hazard:

- ☑ Use of paint, adhesives or sealants with high Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) content on RMIT sites
- ☑ Substance not being used in accordance with the manufacturer and Safety Data Sheet (SDS) instructions
- ☑ Substances being used in areas without sufficient ventilation or near air intakes, vents, windows or doors
- ☑ Not considering the potential effect on adjacent spaces/occupants
- ☑ Not considering the potential effect on other RMIT operations
- ☑ Impact to indoor air quality, of occupied or unoccupied spaces
- ☑ Materials stored, transported, or disposed incorrectly
- ☑ Safety Data Sheets are not reviewed or available during works



### Actions Required:

- ☑ Choose products that are classified as no-VOC, low-VOC or non-toxic
- ☑ RMIT Design Standards specify the use of low-VOC paints, sealants and carpets. Where an alternate is required/recommended, authorisation is required from RMIT **prior to use**
- ☑ Only use these substances away RMIT air intakes, vents, windows or doors, to ensure fumes/odours don't enter the building. Where possible, schedule these works after hours to reduce impact to RMIT operations
- ☑ Ensure adequate ventilation is provided where products are used that containing any level of VOC
- ☑ SDS to be reviewed and understand by all work parties, specifically 'Section 2: Hazards Identification'. Look out for materials that include the following:
  - **Risk Phrases: R20, R23, R26, R36, R37, R42, R49, R67;** and
  - **Safety Phrases: S23, S38, S51, S52 & S63**
- ☑ Safety Data Sheet (SDS) to be available onsite during all works
- ☑ Ensure chemical labels are clear and instructions are followed
- ☑ Note: CSIRO define low-VOC content as materials <50g/L



**SAFETY DATA SHEETS AND SAFE WORKING METHOD  
STATEMENTS NEED TO BE REVIEWED AND FOLLOWED**