

# THE GLOVES ARE ON

The presence of harmful materials and substances in the workshop means that technicians are advised to 'handle with care' - and protect their skin.

By John Challen

The phrase 'getting your hands dirty' used to be seen as a positive. Now, however - in vehicle workshops, at least - it's very much all about protecting those same hands, especially given that diesel exhaust fumes, dirty engine oil and anything else that comes out the system during maintenance can be a hazard.

Exposure of the skin to such by-products can cause eczema/dermatitis at least. That has led to widespread use of gloves, typically made from fuel-resistant nitrile rubber. But there are other ways to protect the skin, and workshops are taking the situation very seriously.

The official guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to protect against skin problems is to avoid contact with harmful substances. That's impossible in a vehicle workshop, given their pervasive presence. The HSE advice stresses the importance of basing the choice of glove on the work being carried out, the individual and the environment. Gloves should meet standard EN374-3 and latex items should be avoided due to allergies that can be caused from their use. HSE also advises that users investigate the breakthrough

time - the time it takes a chemical to permeate through the glove material - and also the permeation rate; the higher the rate, the more of the chemical will move through the skin.

## REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

For Rob Vasey, depot manager at the Northampton site of Scania dealer TruckEast, hand and skin protection is taken very seriously, as is the choice of glove. "Nitrile gloves are thick enough to protect, but not too thick that they prevent dexterity," he says. In terms of longevity, Vasey explains the gloves are used and disposed of when required, with plenty of boxes of gloves around the workshop to replace those that have served their purpose. "Once a technician has changed the oil or handled any sort of chemical such as AdBlue, they can degrade and become slippery, so they'll get changed. Also, when doing up bolts, they can catch and get holes in so, again, a new pair will be required."

At TruckEast Northampton, a technician would get through around four pairs of gloves for each two-hour inspection, on average.

Aside from the standard nitrile gloves, there are a few other hand protection options for technicians, depending on



the situation. TruckEast also supplies a cut-resistant coated glove, which resembles that used for playing golf. For jobs such as welding, there are flame-retardant items to wear.

## PUT UP BARRIERS

Beyond gloves, some technicians like - or choose - to apply barrier cream on their hands and skin. "If they are doing some intricate work on an engine or any other component that has small moving parts, such as pins, barrier cream enables a better purchase on the part," explains Vasey.

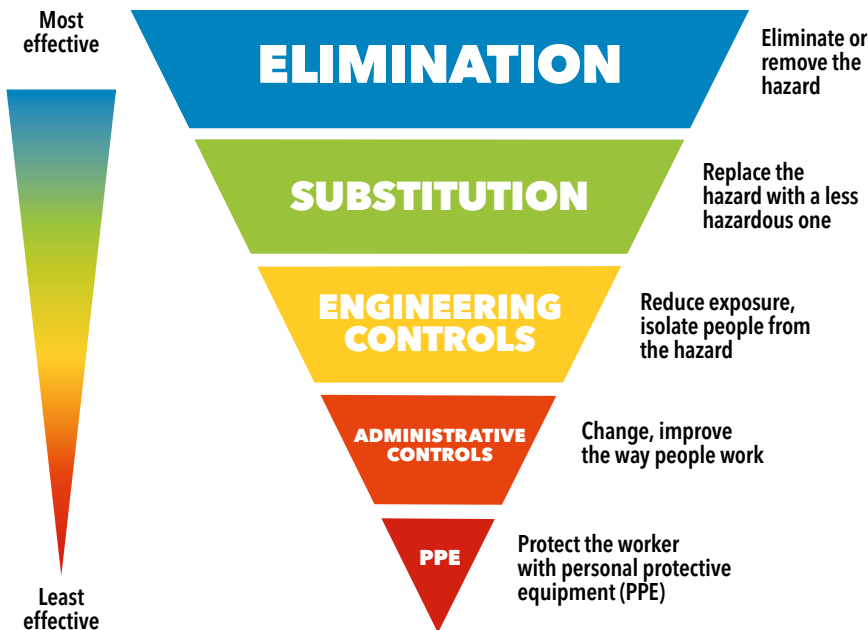
Beyond hand protection, Vasey says best practice clothing at TruckEast means a full set of overalls that are tailored to each technician. "The overalls will typically be changed every day," he confirms. "The theory is that you should have a clean set on every day because contaminants can get into them as well. They are fully sleeved and collared, protecting as much of the body as possible. Some of the guys put goggles on as well because they don't want to damage their eyes."

Elsewhere, in public service vehicle workshops, dealing with hand and skin protection is also of the utmost importance. "The start point is always



## THE IRTE LINE

Within the IRTE's Workshop Accreditation (WA) initiative, there is a focus on health and safety within the workshop, covering areas such as first aid boxes, eye wash stations, PPE and documents for staff, including guidelines about protective clothing or gloves. John Eastman, chair of the IRTE's professional sector council, says these checks "ensure that there is a procedure in place within the workshop that is monitored and recorded when technicians sign for their kit. The most important element is having a good process or risk assessment in the workshop. Our role is to check everything is in place."



through a rigorous process of COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) assessment," states Vince Hearn, health safety, security and environment manager, Arriva UK Bus. (See also [www.is.gd/etazit](http://www.is.gd/etazit) for HSE resources, including examples.) "This assessment identifies the substances, quantities and harmful effects of the oils, greases, lubricants, solvents used within the workshop. Then, using the hierarchy of control [pictured

above], we determine the actions to take in order to limit exposure."

He adds that lubricant and chemical suppliers are required to provide businesses with manufacturer safety data sheets (MSDS) stating the harmful characteristics of the substances, which must be referred to when completing the COSHH assessments. "With regard to skin care, particular attention needs to be paid to any substances that are

potential skin sensitisers," he adds, which means that they will create an allergic reaction on contact, such as a rash.

Hearn explains that within Arriva UK Bus, most substances are delivered in primary-packaged containers and dispensed through a closed system of pipes/nozzles. "The exposure to potentially harmful substances in these cases is limited."

Like TruckEast, Arriva uses nitrile gloves, which Hearn describes as hardwearing and robust. In addition, "Engineers wear high-viz orange two-piece overalls (trousers and jacket) with sleeves rolled down," explains Hearn. "There's also a requirement to wear a second layer under the overalls (except on the arms)." For some occasional tasks, long gauntlets are required.

While there have been no reported incidents of any allergic reactions, all engineering staff at Arriva are provided with information about dermatitis and skincare through posters (displayed within washrooms), toolbox talks and standard operating procedures. "We carry out annual health surveillance that includes checking skin condition for dermatitis," says Hearn. "We also obtain monthly management data of usage from the suppliers." **TE**