

Hazard Alert - Dexbond 10B Closure sealant – Why is there a concern?

Telstra (and obviously their sub-contractor workforce through the ISGM arrangement) is rolling out a new method of anchoring cables into enclosures for cables (both copper and fibre) in underground pits in the telecommunications network.

The 2 part sealant (Part A and Part B) being used comes from an Irish company, and is being portrayed as a “miracle” material for anchoring cables. It is intended to replace the current heat shrink and epoxy methods and is contained in a 2 compartment cartridge.

The underlying problem that will always exist with this product is that the uncured Part B contains isocyanates, which, according to the published Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) are potentially carcinogenic. In addition, the unused, unmixed products remaining in the cartridge are deemed “hazardous waste” and need to be disposed of carefully. A number of “work arounds” have been proposed to reduce the exposure risk, but **the indisputable fact remains that Part B of the product is potentially carcinogenic**, and requires internationally recognized Hazard warnings to be attached to the mixture cartridge.

What is meant to happen during curing of the Part A and Part B mixture (after being squeezed out of the cartridge) is that the parts are allegedly completely mixed via a special mixing nozzle screwed onto the end of the cartridge. When the mixture is applied into an enclosure, there is reduced risk of outgassing of the potentially carcinogenic Part B product whilst the mixed product “goes off”. The remaining uncured Part A and Part B is held in the re-capped cartridge until it is “properly” disposed of.

The Union is left “gobsmacked” that a product with potential carcinogenic outcomes (and defined as such in the manufacturer’s MSDS), is being introduced into the Telstra network, with Telstra relying on “Administrative” (ie written words and instructions) and “Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)” to ensure the safety of workers. These two levels of control are at the “least acceptable” bottom of the universally known 6 level Health & Safety “Hierarchy Of Control” that places “Elimination” of the problem at the top of the control pyramid. Surely history (and the current concerns about other carcinogenic materials used in the network eg asbestos) indicates that when there is a background of sub-contracting cutting corners and a lack of monitoring of the work undertaken, things can go very, very wrong.

So why go down the path of introducing a potential carcinogen?

Telstra’s Health and Safety group are arguing that the product reduces both the risks associated with LPG methods of heat shrinking (ie less usage, but not elimination of the gas torch), and the risks associated with dangers of the use of epoxy. They claim in their risk assessment document that there could be hand strain involved when mixing epoxy, time in the sun, time sitting in the pit, time exposed to pollution and traffic, etc. The argument on the use of epoxy is even more puzzling when another comment in the risk assessment indicates “.... there have (been) no epoxy resin incidents within the last 5 years Jul 2007-Jun 2012”

We are sure the real reason this is being introduced is to speed up the time taken to do cable joints (supposedly up to 20 minutes less per enclosure), and Telstra is prepared to take health and safety risks to do it – this is totally unacceptable, and based on flawed arguments that are buried in their own risk assessment done by an “in house” Telstra Health & Safety employee – Siegfried Hecker .

CEPU says this cavalier approach to health & safety has to stop, and clearly advises members (and any other worker in the telco industry) to refuse to use this potentially hazardous and carcinogenic product.

Remember, all employees have a right by law to refuse to perform work which they believe could pose a serious risk to their health and safety.

“A worker may cease, or refuse to carry out, work if the worker has a reasonable concern that to carry out the work would expose the worker to a serious risk to the worker’s health and safety, emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard”

Work Health and Safety Act 2011, cl 84.

For further information, contact the Victorian CEPU (CWU) P&T Branch Office: 03 9600 9100

JOAN DOYLE
Branch Secretary