

Fact Sheet

Fuel Oils



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Fuel oils are a variety of yellowish to light brown liquid mixtures that come from crude petroleum. Some chemicals found in fuel oils may evaporate easily, while others may more easily dissolve in water.

Fuel oils are produced by different petroleum refining processes, depending on their intended uses. Fuel oils may be used as fuel for engines, lamps, heaters, furnaces, and stoves, or as solvents.

Some commonly found fuel oils include kerosene, diesel fuel, jet fuel, range oil, and home heating oil. These fuel oils differ from one another by their hydrocarbon compositions, boiling point ranges, chemical additives, and uses.

Exposure

The most likely way for a person to be exposed to fuel oils in the home is if a person uses a kerosene heater. If handling fuel oils or using fuel oil to clean equipment at a job, or if fuel oils are stored in the workplace, a person may be exposed through contact with the skin or in the air. Some workers may be exposed to fuel oils through the skin if they come into contact with them without adequate protection, such as gloves, boots, coveralls, or other protective clothing.

For immediate assistance, call the Poison Control Center Hotline: 1-800-222-1222.

A person may also be exposed to fuel oils by swimming in waters where fuel oils have spilled. If fuel oils have leaked from underground storage tanks and entered underground water, a person may drink contaminated well water.

The vapor of fuel oils can also move through the soil and enter basements of homes or buildings near areas where leaks have occurred. Children may also be exposed by playing in soil contaminated with fuel oils.

Health Effects

Little information is available about the health effects that may be caused by fuel oils.

Inhalation- Breathing some fuel oils for short periods may cause nausea, eye irritation, increased blood pressure, headache, light-headedness, loss of appetite, poor coordination, and difficulty concentrating. Breathing diesel fuel vapors for long periods may cause kidney damage and lower the blood's ability to clot.

Ingestion- Drinking small amounts of kerosene may cause vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, stomach swelling and cramps, drowsiness, restlessness, painful breathing, irritability, and unconsciousness. Drinking large amounts of kerosene may cause convulsions, coma or death. Do not induce vomiting.

Skin Contact- Skin contact with kerosene for short periods may cause itchy, red, sore, or peeling skin.

Diagnosis

There is no medical test that shows if a person has been exposed to fuel oils. Tests are available to determine if some of the chemicals commonly found in fuel oils are in the blood. However, the presence of these chemicals in blood may not necessarily mean that a person has been exposed to fuel oils. The hospital or clinician may order special lab testing to rule in or rule out other possible medical conditions.



For more sources of information on this topic visit or contact:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH TOXICS AND HEALTH HOTLINE: 1-800-648-6942

MICHIGAN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ADMINISTRATION (MIOSHA) www.michigan.gov/miosha

THE AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES AND DISEASE REGISTRY: www.atsdr.cdc.gov 1-888-422-8737