

## Preventing Dermatitis

- Skin disorders or dermatitis may be caused by an unlimited number of substances or conditions.
- Classification of skin disorders may be broken down into five general categories of agents:
  1. Chemical
  2. Mechanical
  3. Physical
  4. Biological
  5. Botanical
- Chemical agents that cause dermatitis fall into two groups — *primary irritants* and *sensitizers*.
  - Primary irritants react on contact, causing chemical burns and dermatitis.
  - Sensitizers act by sensitizing a worker, so that dermatitis develops from a very low, non-irritating exposure, which in the past would not have caused a reaction.
- Mechanical agents: abrasions, bruises and other skin problems may be caused from blows, cuts, pressure and excessive friction.
  - Areas of the skin that have been subjected to repeated stress may develop blisters or calluses.
- Physical agents: heat, cold, wind, water, radiation, electricity and sunlight can cause burns, heat rash, heat cramps, frostbite, skin cancer and other types of skin damage.
- Biological agents: bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites can cause skin infections, boils, athlete's foot and other painful skin diseases.
- Botanical agents: many plants and trees can cause dermatitis — among the most common are poison ivy and poison oak.

### Prevent dermatitis by following these basic practices:

- Wash hands often using the proper cleansers and lots of water.
- Never use solvent to clean your hands.
- Remove irritants at once if they come in contact with the skin.
- Treat wounds promptly — if left unprotected infection may set in.
- Use and maintain the correct personal protective equipment for the job.
- Keep work area clean; put tools and supplies away after use.
- Check with your supervisor where protective creams may be used; they are not as effective as protective equipment, but they may be used where the clothing cannot cover.
- Use machine guards to protect the body from injury.