

Information Document: Formaldehyde and Passive Sampling

Concerns have been raised at the Faculty of Occupational Hygiene Committee regarding the accuracy of measuring airborne formaldehyde concentrations using passive samplers where the source of formaldehyde is formalin. There is potential for a negative interference with methanol in the formalin resulting in underestimation of exposures. This is potentially also an issue with other aqueous solutions containing methanol which are not marketed under the 'formalin' name, such as some embalming solutions.

Discussions have taken place with 3M which have concluded that diffusive samplers can be used to measure formaldehyde from formalin with minimal (less than 3%) error providing the methanol content of the solution is no higher than 3%. If the available information indicates that the methanol content of the solution may exceed 3%, the occupational hygienist should consider confirming this level is not exceeded by measurement. The hygienist should recognise that the level of methanol declared in the Safety Data Sheet may not be accurate.