


Glycolic Acid



Glycolic acid is widely used in cosmetic products. Glycolic acid belongs to a group of chemicals commonly known as fruit acids or AHAs (alpha hydroxy acids). It has industrial and domestic uses but this sheet only discusses the use of glycolic acid in cosmetics.

NICNAS conducted a preliminary assessment of the use of glycolic acid in cosmetics in April 2000. These are the main findings of the preliminary assessment. The assessment concluded there was no significant risk and that a full assessment was not required at this stage.

A product containing 10% or more glycolic acid is classed as a Hazardous Substance.

Glycolic acid is not yet classified under the Australian Dangerous Goods Code. However, substances containing high concentrations of glycolic acid are corrosive and fit into Class 8 of the Code.

Glycolic acid irritates the skin and eyes. Glycolic acid may increase the sensitivity to sunburn in some people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The more glycolic acid in a product the more irritating it is to the skin. Product labels must reflect the different levels of hazard according to the concentration of glycolic acid in the product.

Workers using cosmetics containing glycolic acid should:

- keep the container tightly closed and out of reach of children and
- wear protection for their skin and avoid touching their eyes.

Workers formulating cosmetic products containing glycolic acid should wear protection for their skin and if necessary their eyes.

The assessment found that cosmetics available to the public did not always meet labelling requirements. The presence of glycolic acid must be clearly stated on the label of cosmetics.

Consumers should be advised that using glycolic acid may cause an increased sensitivity to sunburn and that a sunscreen should also be used. Use of the product should be discontinued if skin irritation occurs.

More information on glycolic acid can be found in the Material Safety Data Sheet available from the supplier. The most comprehensive source of information is the detailed assessment of glycolic acid published by the National Industrial Chemical Notification and Assessments Scheme (NICNAS). This is available free of charge by calling 1800 638 528. More information on the use of industrial chemicals can be found at the NICNAS website: www.nicnas.gov.au