

Suggestions for handling Essential Oils and Oleoresins

Updated 26 May 2008

1.0 Introduction

The following are our suggestions for handling Essential Oils and Oleoresins. Please consult the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) before handling any Essential Oil or Oleoresin. Where there is disparity between this information sheet and the MSDS, the MSDS takes precedence. Please read our standard disclaimer.

2.0 Handling precautions

- Always have an appropriate spill kit handy available.
- ALL essential oils and oleoresins should be regarded as skin and eye irritants. Some, like capsicum (and the various species of chilli) are obviously more irritant than others. Capsicum oleoresin is the active component of the police force's "pepper spray" used to subdue violent offenders.

In all cases, you must use appropriate personal protection equipment. Long-sleeved clothing, rubber or latex gloves, and splash goggles (not just safety glasses) are advisable for all but the most innocuous materials. If you are uncertain treat the material as if it were hazardous.

Coloured materials like Capsicum, Paprika, Turmeric, Basil etc can stain clothing and are difficult to remove. Always wear protective coats or overalls!

3.0 First Aid

3.1 Contact with Skin

Though the skin may feel like it is "burning", it is useless to simply wash with lots of cold water as you would for a normal burn or scald. Wipe the liquid off immediately with paper towels, then wash with warm soapy water. Staining materials (eg Paprika) may be removed with Lemon Oil, then the residual oil washed off with soap. Allergic reactions are rare, but not unheard-of.

3.2 Eye

Wash with copious amounts of cool water. Irritation may be reduced by rinsing with saline solution, and medical attention sought.

3.3 Ingestion

Severe mouth irritation can be reduced by rinsing with milk or yoghurt. Drinking water is useless, but saline solution can reduce the last traces of irritation. If material has been swallowed, seek medical attention.



4.0 Storage

Short-term storage (days) in HDPE jerrycans or pails is suitable for most oils and resins. Some, especially those containing terpenes such as citrus oils, will gradually leach through the plastic and the container will visibly collapse inwards. These materials should be stored in steel, aluminium or (where permissible) glass containers.

Long-term storage should be in steel or aluminium containers (DG-grade plastic is sometimes OK), in cool conditions and away from sunlight. When correctly sealed and stored most essential oils will have a shelf-life of two years, while oleoresins will have a shelf life of up to three years.

5.0 Dispensing and packing

Plastic utensils (eg. jugs and funnels) tend to absorb traces of the essential oils and resins passing through them so it is recommended to use dedicated items for dispensing these materials.

At all times the appropriate personal protection (overalls, gloves, etc.) must be worn.

A bit of common sense is required here. Don't try to pour from a full 25kg drum straight into a 1kg jerry can. Spilled resins and oils are not only expensive, but are also very difficult to clean up.

6.0 Clean-up

A few suggestions:

- Let jugs and funnels drain into the sink for as long as possible, then wipe up as much of the gunk as you can with paper towels before starting the washup.
- Squirt a little full-strength dishwashing liquid straight on to the dirty surface, then gently brush it in with a wet bottlebrush or soft dish wash brush, then rinse.
- Use warm water, not hot! The wet steam forms aerosol droplets which carry the oils and resins, straight up on to your face.

7.0 Handling Spills

- Use absorbent mats or tubes to keep the material from spreading.
- Soak up all spilled material with inert absorbent. DO NOT attempt to flush away to stormwater or sewer drains.
- Once all possible spilled material has been soaked up, residual amounts may be washed away or mopped up using detergent in warm water.

Note that many surfaces can be significantly softened or damaged by essential oil spills, although this damage may not become evident immediately. Spillages on Asphalt and vinyl floor-coatings should be attended to immediately.