

Health and Safety Guide No. 58

# METHYL ISOBUTYL KETONE HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDE



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**Health and Safety Guide No. 58**

**METHYL ISOBUTYL  
KETONE  
HEALTH AND  
SAFETY GUIDE**

This is a companion volume to  
**Environmental Health Criteria 117: Methyl isobutyl ketone**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Health Criteria (EHC) documents produced by the International Programme on Chemical Safety include an assessment of the effects on the environment and on human health of exposure to a chemical or combination of chemicals, or physical or biological agents. They also provide guidelines for setting exposure limits.

The purpose of a Health and Safety Guide is to facilitate the application of these guidelines in national chemical safety programmes. The first three sections of a Health and Safety Guide highlight the relevant technical information in the corresponding EHC. Section 4 includes advice on preventive and protective measures and emergency action; health workers should be thoroughly familiar with the medical information to ensure that they can act efficiently in an emergency. Within the Guide is a Summary of Chemical Safety Information which should be readily available, and should be clearly explained, to all who could come into contact with the chemical. The section on regulatory information has been extracted from the legal file of the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) and from other United Nations sources.

The target readership includes occupational health services, those in ministries, governmental agencies, industry, and trade unions who are involved in the safe use of chemicals and the avoidance of environmental health hazards, and those wanting more information on this topic. An attempt has been made to use only terms that will be familiar to the intended user. However, sections 1 and 2 inevitably contain some technical terms. A bibliography has been included for readers who require further background information.

Revision of the information in this Guide will take place in due course, and the eventual aim is to use standardized terminology. Comments on any difficulties encountered in using the Guide would be very helpful and should be addressed to:

The Manager  
International Programme on Chemical Safety  
Division of Environmental Health  
World Health Organization  
1211 Geneva 27  
Switzerland

**THE INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE  
SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A  
STARTING POINT TO A COMPREHENSIVE  
HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAMME**

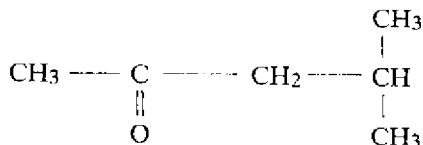


# 1. PRODUCT IDENTITY AND USES

## 1.1 Identity

Common name: methyl isobutyl ketone (MIBK)

Chemical structure



Chemical formula:  $\text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}$

Relative molecular mass: 100.16

CAS chemical name: 4-methyl-2-pentanone

CAS registry number: 108-10-1

RTECS registry number: SA9275000

Purity: MIBK is typically 99% (w/w) pure. Impurities that may be present include: dimethyl heptane (0.3%), water (0.1%), methyl isobutyl carbinol (0.06%), mesityl oxide (0.03%), acetic acid (0.002%), and non-volatile components (0.002%).

## 1.2 Physical and Chemical Properties

MIBK is a clear liquid with a sweet odour; the odour threshold is  $1.64 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (0.4 ppm). It is moderately soluble in water.

Some physical and chemical properties of MIBK are given in the Summary of Chemical Safety Information (section 6).

## PRODUCT IDENTITY AND USES

MIBK can react violently with oxidizing and reducing agents. When heated, peroxides may form by auto-oxidation and may explode spontaneously.

### 1.3 Analytical Methods

Gas chromatography combined with flame ionization or mass spectroscopy is a suitable technique for the determination of MIBK, which can be detected in air (by trapping with, e.g., charcoal), in water (e.g., headspace or extraction), and in biological tissues (e.g., headspace or extraction).

### 1.4 Uses

MIBK, which occurs naturally in food, is a permitted flavouring agent and is used in food-contact materials. It is a component of cellulose and polyurethane lacquers and paint solvents. It is also used: as an extraction solvent; in the manufacture of methyl amyl alcohol; and as a denaturant for ethyl alcohol.

## 2. SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

### 2.1 Human Exposure to MIBK

The general population is exposed to low levels of MIBK, which has been detected in certain foods at levels in the mg/kg range. Two countries have established maximum ambient air concentrations in the range of 0.1–0.2 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for general population exposure.

Occupational exposure occurs particularly in the production and use of lacquers, paints, and extraction solvents. The major route of exposure is inhalation.

### 2.2 Uptake, Metabolism, and Excretion

MIBK is absorbed in animals via inhalation, ingestion, and through the skin. It is widely distributed throughout the body. MIBK is readily metabolized to water-soluble excretory products and can induce metabolic activation in the liver. The urine is the major route of excretion for metabolites.

### 2.3 Effects on Animals

In animal studies, the acute systemic toxicity of MIBK, via the oral and inhalation routes of exposure, is low. In a 90-day gavage study on rats, a no-observed-effect level (NOEL) of 50 mg/kg per day was found. In 90-day inhalation studies on rats and mice, concentrations of up to 4100 mg/m<sup>3</sup> (1000 ppm) did not result in significant toxicity, though compound-related reversible morphological changes were reported in the liver and kidney. Evidence of central nervous system depression was seen in animals exposed to a level of 4100 mg/m<sup>3</sup> (1000 ppm). In a number of studies, exposure to MIBK concentrations as low as 1025 mg/m<sup>3</sup> (250 ppm) resulted in an increase in liver size and induced hepatic microsomal metabolism. This may be responsible for the exacerbation of haloalkane toxicity and for the potentiation of the neurotoxicity of *n*-hexane. MIBK was also found to potentiate the cholestatic effects of manganese given with, or without, bilirubin. In 90-day studies on mice, rats, dogs, and monkeys, only male rats developed hyaline droplets in the proximal tubules

## SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

of the kidney. Effects on behaviour were reported in baboons exposed for 7 days to  $205 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (50 ppm).

At a concentration of  $4100 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (1000 ppm), MIBK was not embryotoxic, fetotoxic, or teratogenic in rats or mice. Fetotoxicity was only observed at concentrations of MIBK that caused maternal toxicity.

MIBK did not induce gene mutations in *in vitro* bacterial test systems with, or without, metabolic activation. Negative results were also obtained *in vitro* with, or without, metabolic activation, in tests for mitotic gene conversion in yeast, and for gene mutation in cultured mammalian cells. The results of *in vitro* assays for unscheduled DNA synthesis in primary rat hepatocytes and for structural chromosome damage in cultured rat liver cells were negative. An *in vivo* micronucleus test on mice was negative. These data indicate that MIBK is not genotoxic. No long-term or carcinogenicity studies are available.

The toxicity of MIBK for aquatic organisms and microorganisms is low.

### 2.4 Effects on Human Beings

The low odour threshold ( $1.64 \text{ mg/m}^3$ ) and the irritant effects can provide warning of high concentrations. Exposure to levels of  $10\text{--}410 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (2.4–100 ppm) produced perceptible irritation of the eyes, nose, or throat, and  $820 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (200 ppm) produced discomfort. Symptoms, such as headache, nausea, or vertigo, also occurred at  $10\text{--}410 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (2.4–100 ppm). A 2-h exposure of up to  $200 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (50 ppm) did not produce any significant effects on a simple reaction-time task or a test of mental arithmetic.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of the irritant effects of MIBK, contact with the skin and eyes should be avoided. Ingestion of MIBK should not occur with good practices; workers who come into contact with MIBK should not be at risk, provided that exposure levels in the workplace are kept as low as possible and within the prescribed control limits.

The half-life of MIBK in the environment is short and its toxicity for aquatic organisms is low. Consequently, there is no risk for the environment, provided that there are adequate controls on disposal.

## **4. HUMAN HEALTH HAZARDS, PREVENTION AND PROTECTION, EMERGENCY ACTION**

### **4.1 Main Human Health Hazards, Prevention and Protection, First Aid**

MIBK causes eye and respiratory tract irritation and has reversible depressant effects on the central nervous system.

The hazards can be avoided by taking the appropriate precautions and by controlling exposure.

#### *4.1.1 Advice to physicians*

##### *4.1.1.1 Symptoms of poisoning*

Symptoms and signs include: irritation of the eyes, skin, and respiratory tract, and depression of the central nervous system, manifested by headaches, nausea, and narcosis. Gastrointestinal pain and hepatic toxicity may occur with exposure to high concentrations.

##### *4.1.1.2 Medical advice*

In case of poisoning by MIBK, contact the nearest Poisons Information Centre for detailed advice on treatment. Information on first aid is provided in the Summary of Chemical Safety Information. If breathing ceases or becomes weak and irregular, artificial respiration should be applied and oxygen administered. If there has been ingestion, vomiting should not be induced, because of the risk of aspiration into the lungs and the production of chemical pneumonitis. Gastric lavage can be given if a cuffed endotracheal tube is used.

##### *4.1.2 Health surveillance advice*

A pre-employment medical examination is advised for workers who will be regularly exposed to MIBK. If routine medical checks are undertaken, emphasis should be placed on examination of the central nervous system, respiratory tract, gastrointestinal tract, and skin.

# HUMAN HEALTH HAZARDS, PREVENTION AND PROTECTION, EMERGENCY ACTION

## 4.2 Safety in Use

Air levels should be kept as low as practicable using suitably designed plant and engineering controls, such as local exhaust ventilation. Respiratory protection should be readily available for use in enclosed spaces, and for certain maintenance operations. Self-contained breathing apparatus should be available for use in emergencies. Skin and eye protection is recommended, when exposure to liquid MIBK is likely to occur.

## 4.3 Explosion and Fire Hazards

### 4.3.1 *Flammability and explosion*

MIBK is highly flammable and adequate ventilation should be provided. Smoking should be prohibited and electrical equipment should be designed to a recognized, explosion-proof standard.

### 4.3.2 *Fire*

Fire extinguishers containing carbon dioxide, dry powder, or foam are recommended. Flashback along a vapour trail may occur. Water should not be used, since this may cause the fire to spread, though a water spray can be used to cool containers.

## 4.4 Storage

Drums should be stored in a well-ventilated area away from sources of ignition and heat. The storage temperature should not exceed 40 °C.

## 4.5 Transport

Comply with national and international requirements regarding the transport of hazardous material. Containers should be in good condition and properly labelled. Keep containers in a well-ventilated place, away from sources of ignition. When pumping, the flow of MIBK may generate electrostatic charges and, therefore, all equipment should be earthed.

## HUMAN HEALTH HAZARDS, PREVENTION AND PROTECTION, EMERGENCY ACTION

### 4.6 Spillage and Disposal

#### 4.6.1 Spillage

In the event of spillage, naked flames, sparks, and heat should be avoided. Contact with skin and eyes should be avoided by wearing suitable protective gloves, face-shield and boots. Liquid should be prevented from entering drains and sewers. Spillages (small-scale) should be absorbed on paper towels, sawdust, or sand, and all material should be removed to a safe place for subsequent disposal.

#### 4.6.2 Disposal

The International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals recommends:

“Incineration, open burning, use as a boiler fuel. Spray into the furnace. Incineration will become easier by mixing with a more flammable solvent.”

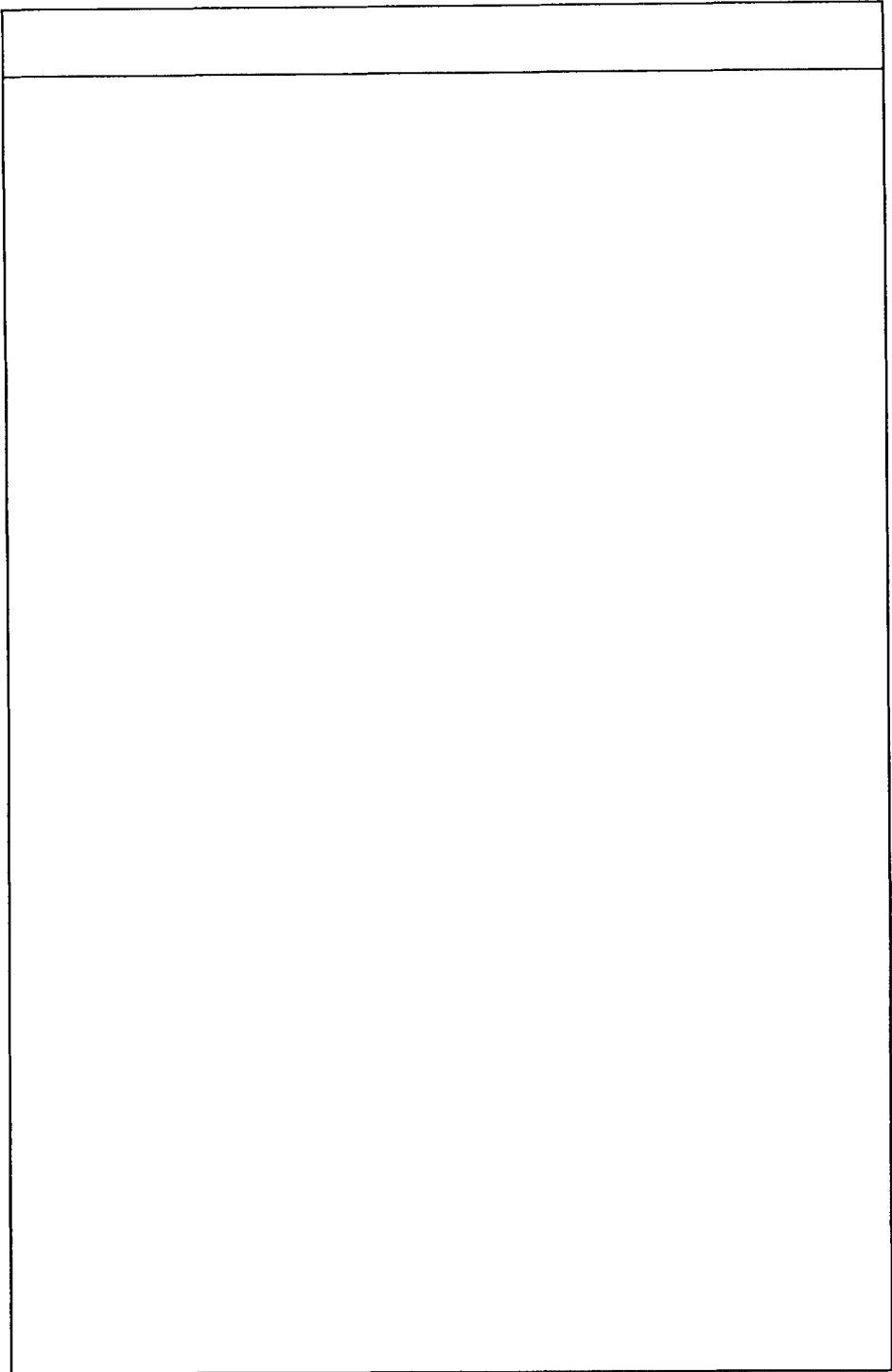


## **5. HAZARDS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR PREVENTION**

Industrial discharges from the manufacture, formulation, and technical applications of MIBK should be controlled.

MIBK has a short half-life in the atmosphere and is also biodegraded in water. It is not expected to bioaccumulate.

The toxicity of MIBK for microorganisms and aquatic organisms is low.



## 6. SUMMARY OF CHEMICAL SAFETY INFORMATION

*This summary should be easily available to all health workers concerned with, and users of, methyl isobutyl ketone. It should be displayed at, or near, entrances to areas where there is potential exposure to methyl isobutyl ketone, and on processing equipment and containers. The summary should be translated into the appropriate language(s). All persons potentially exposed to the chemical should also have the instructions in the summary clearly explained.*

*Space is available for insertion of the National Occupational Exposure Limit, the address and telephone number of the National Poison Control Centre, and local trade names.*

## SUMMARY OF CHEMICAL SAFETY INFORMATION

### METHYL ISOBUTYL KETONE (MIBK)

CAS name: 4-methyl-2-pentanone Chemical formula: C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>12</sub>O

CAS registry number: 108-10-1 RTECS registry number: SA9275000

#### PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

Boiling point (°C)	116
Freezing point (°C)	-80
Specific gravity (20 °C/4 °C)	0.8017
Vapour pressure (KPa; 20 °C)	1.99
Relative molecular mass	100.16
<i>n</i> -Octanol/water partition coefficient (low P <sub>ow</sub> )	1.38
Solubility in water (g/litre; 20 °C)	17
Vapour density (air = 1)	3.45
Autoignition temperature (°C)	460
Explosion limits in air (% by volume)	1.4-7.5
Closed-cup flashpoint (°C)	14

#### OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Colourless, volatile liquid with a sweet odour; odour threshold approximately 1.6 mg/m<sup>3</sup> (0.4ppm)

## HAZARDS/SYMPTOMS

## PREVENTION AND PROTECTION FIRST AID

**Vapour/fumes**

**SKIN:** MIBK liquid may irritate the skin, when in close contact; repeated contact may produce dermatitis because of its defatting properties

Avoid skin contact; wear protective clothing

Remove from exposure; remove contaminated clothing; wash skin thoroughly with soap and plenty of water

**EYES:** Undiluted MIBK is an irritant; high vapour concentrations are irritant

Wear face-shield or goggles

Remove from exposure; irrigate the eyes thoroughly with water or eyewash solution for 15 minutes; obtain medical attention

**INHALATION:** MIBK at high concentrations is a respiratory irritant; it may cause depression of the central nervous system, such as dizziness, fatigue, and nausea

Control work environment to within recommended exposure limit; otherwise provide respiratory protection, such as a respirator

Remove patient to fresh air and keep warm; if breathing has stopped, apply artificial respiration; obtain medical attention

## SUMMARY OF CHEMICAL SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

HAZARDS/SYMPTOMS	PREVENTION AND PROTECTION	FIRST AID
<p>INGESTION: should not occur with good work practices</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT: half-life in the environment is short; low toxicity for microorganisms and aquatic organisms; should not pose a risk, provided there are adequate controls to minimize emissions</p>	<p>Do not eat, drink, or smoke during work</p> <p>Industrial discharges should be minimized and regulated; disposal should only be via incineration</p>	<p>Rinse mouth; vomiting should not be induced; keep patient warm and rested; obtain medical attention</p>

SPILLAGE STORAGE	FIRE AND EXPLOSION	Take appropriate personal precautions; absorb spillage on paper towel, sawdust, or sand, for subsequent action; avoid spills entering drains or surface waters	Store drums in a well-ventilated area in fire-resistant containers; metal containers should be electrically-grounded, when transferring liquid	Adequate ventilation should be provided and there should be no sources of sparks, heat, or naked flames; flashback along a vapour trail may occur; fire extinguishers containing carbon dioxide, dry powder, or foam are recommended; water sprays should not be used, except to cool containers
WASTE DISPOSAL		LABELLING		
Waste material should be incinerated in an approved manner	National Occupational Exposure Limit:	United Nations 1245	Hazard Class 3 (flammable liquid)	Packing Group III (medium danger)
	National Poison Control Centre:			
	Local trade names:			

## 7. CURRENT REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, AND STANDARDS

The information given in this section has been extracted from the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) legal file. A full reference to the original national document from which the information was extracted can be obtained from IRPTC. When no effective date appears in the IRPTC legal file, the year of the reference from which the data are taken is indicated by (r).

The reader should be aware that regulatory decisions about chemicals, taken in a certain country, can only be fully understood in the framework of the legislation of that country. The regulations and guidelines of all countries are subject to change and should always be verified with appropriate regulatory authorities before application

### 7.1 Regulation of Emissions

In the Federal Republic of Germany, MIBK belongs to Class III, the air emissions of which must not exceed (as the sum of all compounds in any class)  $150 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (37 ppm), at a mass flow of  $\geq 3 \text{ kg/h}$ . The maximum recommended ambient concentration is  $0.2 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (0.05 ppm) in Czechoslovakia, and it must not exceed  $0.1 \text{ mg/m}^3$  (0.025 ppm) in the USSR.

### 7.2 Regulation of Food and Food Wrappings

MIBK is allowed as a component of food-packaging materials in the EEC and in the USA.

### 7.3 Regulation of Beverages

The Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Flavouring Substances suggested a limit of 5 mg/litre in beverages.

### 7.4 Exposure Limit Values

Some occupational air exposure limit values are given in the table on pages 24-26.



## CURRENT REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, AND STANDARDS

### 7.5 Labelling and Packaging

The United Nations recommends labelling as Hazard Class 3 (flammable liquid), Packing Group III (medium danger).

In the European Economic Community, MIBK is labelled as follows:

*Highly flammable, keep container in a well-ventilated place, keep away from sources of ignition, no smoking, do not breathe gas/fumes/vapour spray. Take precautionary measures against static discharges.*

## CURRENT REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, AND STANDARDS

### OCCUPATIONAL AIR EXPOSURE LIMITS

Country/ organization	Exposure limit description <sup>a</sup>	Value (mg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Effective date <sup>b</sup>
Australia	Recommended threshold limit value (TLV) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	205 300	1983(r)
Belgium	Recommended threshold limit value (TLV) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	205 300	1988(r)
Finland	Permissible exposure limit (MPC) -Time weighted average(TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	210 315	1987
Germany (Federal Republic of)	Recommended threshold limit value (MAK) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	400 2000	1988(r)
Japan	Administrative concentration -Time weighted average (TWA)	205	1990(n)

Netherlands	Recommended threshold limit value (MXL) -Time weighted average (TWA)	240	1989(r)
Poland	Permissible exposure limit (MPC) -Time weighted average (TWA)	200	1982(r)
Romania	Permissible exposure limit (MPC) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Ceiling value (CLV)	200 300	1984(r)
Switzerland	Permissible exposure limit (MAK) -Time weighted average (TWA)	205	1987(r)
Sweden	Permissible exposure limit (HLV) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	100 200	1990(n)
United Kingdom	Occupational exposure standard (OES) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	205 300	1990(n)
USA (ACGIH)	Recommended threshold limit value (TLV) -Time weighted average (TWA) -Short-term exposure limit (STEL)	205 307	1989

## CURRENT REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, AND STANDARDS

### OCCUPATIONAL AIR EXPOSURE LIMITS (*continued*)

Country/ organization	Exposure limit description <sup>a</sup>	Value (mg/m <sup>3</sup> )	Effective date <sup>b</sup>
USA (OSHA)	Permissible exposure limit (PEL) -Time weighted average (TWA)	410	1974
USSR	Temporary exposure limit (TSEL) -Ceiling value (CLV)	5	1989
Yugoslavia	Permissible exposure limit (MAC) -Time weighted average (TWA)	410	1971(t)

<sup>a</sup> TWA = a maximum mean exposure limit, generally, over the period of a working day.

STEL = a maximum concentration of exposure for a specified time duration (generally 10-30 min).

<sup>b</sup> n = Notified direct by country.

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