



# Industry Insight

with John Yoswick

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## Testing Shows Dramatic Differences in Isocyanate-Blocking by Spraysuits

New testing announced at the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) earlier this year indicates that not all spraysuits are created equal in terms of preventing penetration of isocyanates.

**Brandon Thomas** of GMG Envirosafe shared the results of testing his company had done on six spraysuits with brand names including DeVilbiss, DuPont, Sata and Shoot Suit. Without disclosing which test results were for each specific suit (because of liability concerns), Thomas showed that only one of the six appeared to fully prevent isocyanate exposure. Four others showed varying levels of exposure, and one appeared to offer no more protection than not wearing a suit at all.

“This is not a finger-pointing exercise,” Thomas said. “It’s an exercise to see if we can do better due diligence in terms of what we’re equipping our employees with. Do all spraysuits perform the same? No. We have a full

gamut here. Our objectives here were to determine if there is a viable way to test a suit for isocyanate exposure, and if so, do we see any variability when comparing suits. We absolutely can test the spraysuits, and absolutely can look at the variability within these suits and the type of protections they actually provide the painters.”

Thomas said he conducted the testing because of the conflicting or unclear responses (if any) he received last fall from the manufacturers of spraysuits when he asked if their suits provide refinish technicians with protection from isocyanates; some of the manufacturers told him no such testing was possible and that only manufacturers with “deep pockets who can afford lawsuits” make any claims about the protection their spraysuits offer.

In his presentation at CIC, held in January in Palm Springs, CA, Thomas emphasized that the testing was not designed to indicate the level

of health risks to which painters wearing the various spraysuits may be exposed. Thomas’s testing was not examining how much isocyanate exposure painters face while spraying in the booth. In fact, his testing began by having a painter wear one of the testing sensors on his wrist outside of the spraysuit. After spraying clearcoat on two fenders and a hood for about 10 to 12 minutes, the sensor showed no isocyanate exposure. (Thomas postulates that this may be because more exposure time is necessary, or that the sensors may have showed more exposure if placed lower in the booth on the painter’s lower legs.)

So Thomas’s testing was done by placing the sensors on a spraycard placed inside the same area in each of the suits, then spraying that area directly for about five seconds with a pass from right-to-left and back again. (A similar test to simulate a spill exposure had similar findings although

one suit that fared fairly well in the spray test did less well in the spill test.)

The sensors turn bright orange with initial isocyanate exposure and a more dull, brownish orange with more saturated exposure. Based on this testing, only one of the six suits tested prohibited isocyanate exposure.

“But this is not a working environment of standing and spraying in a booth for hours,” Thomas said. “What we wanted to confirm is we can test these suits, and we have that ability. So some of the manufacturers’ claims that there is no test is false. And we want to invite and engage the manufacturers to take some ownership of this.”

He said his next step is to present the findings to the manufacturers “to give them the opportunity to recreate it or maybe test all their suits, and then share those results with the [CIC] body.”

“There are a lot of options out there, and unfortunately, shops are li-

## Insurer recognized for emphasis on safety and pollution-prevention

Geico has received the “2015 Excellence in Safety and Pollution Prevention Award” from S/P2, an organization created to help the automotive service and repair industry meet OSHA and EPA guidelines.

**Bob Medved** of S/P2 presented the award to Geico’s **Joe Lacy** at the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) held in Palm Springs, CA. Medved said Geico “excels at safety and pollution prevention,” providing S/P2 training for its entire claims staff, and requiring at least one person at each of its direct repair shops complete the training and testing.

In accepting the award, Lacy acknowledged that in the past he “wasn’t a very safe person,” and that he was “no stranger to emergency rooms.” But having a doctor with a scalpel inches away when he had metal in his eye convinced him to become more focused on safety.

“I don’t ever want to do that again,” Lacy said.

Each year, S/P2 provides training and testing of more than 100,000 students, instructors, shops and claims staff nationwide through industry-specific online safety and pollution prevention training. For more information, visit [www.sp2.org](http://www.sp2.org).

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able for choosing the correct suit, not the manufacturers and not the jobbers or distributors,” Thomas said.

This was the fourth consecutive CIC meeting that included discussion of isocyanates, a family of chemical compounds, found in several products used in collision repair (most notably, clearcoats), that can pose serious and permanent health risks if not handled properly. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), workers improperly exposed to isocyanates can suffer permanent respiratory complications, and even death, from a single episode of overexposure or intermittent exposures at low concentrations. They are a leading cause of occupational asthma.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has stepped up inspections of body shops nationwide as part of a three-year emphasis (until mid-2016) on protecting workers from isocyanate exposure. Collision repair is one of about 10 industries targeted by OSHA under the program. The OSHA shop inspections under this program are not brief; they may be conducted over three or four days, possibly spread out over several weeks.

Inspectors are checking a shop’s chemical inventory, safety data sheets, hazard assessment training and personal protection equipment (PPE). They are checking the shop’s OSHA 300 logs for five years, and reviewing workers’ medical records. They are interviewing employees to ask about PPE usage, asthma diagnosis, or symptoms (such as watery eyes, shortness of breath, chest tightness) that occur at work but dissipate away from work. And they are conducting air sampling and wipe sampling on skin and PPE—and even in areas such as drinking fountains or employee break rooms where other employees could be exposed to isocyanates if a painter, for example, sits down or touches items while still wearing a jumpsuit or gloves.

How long do isocyanates on such surfaces pose an exposure risk for others? Speaking at CIC last fall, **Catherine Sayles** of Bayer Material Science, a raw material supplier of isocyanates to paint manufacturers, said it varies.

“If it’s still wet, I would definitely say you have that potential,” she said. “Once it’s dry, it depends on how much of it is there, how thick it is, how much isocyanate is actually in the product.”

She said shops can check for surface or skin contamination from isocyanates—after clean-up of a spill, for example—by using Swype test kits for aliphatic isocyanates.

Sayles also said her company recommends the use of nitrile gloves (not latex) when working around isocyanates, but cautioned that shops can no longer presume that “blue gloves” are nitrile as opposed to just latex.

“In the past, the latex manufacturers always made their gloves white and the nitrile gloves were blue,” she said. “Now the manufacturers of latex gloves are also making them in different colors, including blue. So there’s confusion sometimes as to whether a blue glove is latex or nitrile. You want to make sure you’re paying attention to the box and what kind of glove you’re using, because latex gloves are not adequate for isocyanate protection.”

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## UT Shop Looks Ahead

differently than we wanted to and we weren’t fixing them how the OEMs recommended, so we’ve gradually stepped away from the DRPs. We only have two now and I’m down to about 25% of our gross sales coming from DRPs. We picked up some fleet work to make up the difference on various fleets and government contracts and it’s worked out well.”

Certifications have become more important now, according to Perkins, and they will become even bigger.

“I think you’re going to see the OEMs become a lot more involved in the repair process and I think they’re going to make their procedures more available. As a result, we’re going to see more body shops becoming more liable for the safety of those vehicles. And when a body shop starts being liable, they’re going to be less willing to give these insurance companies concessions, because now the body shop is taking all the risk.”

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