

Safe Start Up: barber FAQ



I run a barbershop – can I still use talc?

Before the 1970s, talcum powder was often contaminated with asbestos fibres which are known to cause cancer. But since then, all home products containing talcum powder are legally obliged to be asbestos-free.

Talcum powder is made from a naturally occurring purified mineral called talc. It is safe, as long as you use it carefully and sparingly. When dusting clients with talc on a brush, make sure the area is ventilated and avoid breathing in the powder. Most symptoms are caused by accidental or long term breathing in of talc dust, especially in young children. Breathing problems are the most common problem. Talcum powder poisoning may occur when someone accidentally or intentionally breathes in or swallows talcum powder.

Alternatives include cornstarch or cornflour-based powder. Cornstarch powder has larger particles than talc but can still cause breathing problems.

I use washable hand towels in the customer loos – is this OK?

This is fine as long as you wash them each day. We'd recommend paper towels as they're more hygienic.

You could also look into using electric hand dryers – the latest technology is more powerful and energy-efficient which makes them eco-friendly and a more economical option. They will also mean you don't have to dispose of paper towels.

I sell hair products to my customers – do I need safety data sheets for the products?

No, retailers don't need to give out data sheets when customers are buying products to use themselves.

Remember that if you buy a chemical from a retailer to use as part of your work, they need to give you a safety data sheet if you ask for one.

I've heard there are new legal health and safety requirements for hair salons – is this right?

There have been some developments within Europe around new legislation for hairdressers, but there are no changes currently in the pipeline.

If the law changes, we'll update our guides to reflect them.



Find out more

- Find out more at https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/literature_reviews/occupational-health-and-safety-in-the-hairdressing-sector

Some of our clients have asked us to carry out Turkish-style grooming – is this OK?

There are lots of significant issues to consider here, including insurance cover.

The technique of singeing to remove stray hairs has been used for centuries by Turkish barbers. This dramatic technique involves using a lit taper or wand being brought into contact with the hair. Clearly this is potentially very risky, and should only be carried out by professionals, highly competent in the procedure.

I want to use an alum block like in a Turkish barber – how do I clean it?

You shouldn't use this sort of block as they're unhygienic.

I understand the basics of national health and safety law relevant to my business. Are there any other laws around health and safety I need to know about?

You need to check with your local council about the byelaws for hairdressing and barbering.

Most shaving soap-based products contain sodium lauryl sulphate or sodium laureth sulphate which gives us the lather, but I've heard they're linked to cancer – are they safe to use?

Research is still inconclusive. You can buy sulphate-free products.

How many times can I use my styptic stick? How can I clean it between clients?

You should only use it once to be hygienic. You can buy styptic sticks in a match-style pack – one book contains 20 applications.

Got another question?



Email us for guidance at jo.carter@iosh.co.uk