

## **Sulfuric Acid (Oleum) FACT SHEET**

### **What is Oleum?**

Oleum is a colorless to brown fuming vapor that consists of sulfuric acid. The substance can be absorbed into the body by inhalation.

### **What is sulfuric acid?**

It is a clear, colorless, oily liquid that is very corrosive. The acid is used in the manufacture of fertilizers, explosives, other acids, and glue; in the pickling of metal; and in lead-acid batteries (used in most vehicles).

### **What is happens to sulfuric acid when it enters the environment**

Sulfuric acid in the air is formed from sulfur dioxide released when coal, oil, and gas are burned. It dissolves in the water and in the air; it can remain suspended in the air for varying periods of time. The acid contributes to the formation of acid rain.

### **How can I be exposed to sulfuric acid?**

If you work in the chemical or metal plating industry; produce detergents, soaps, fertilizers, or lead-acid batteries; or work in printing, publishing or photography shops. You can be exposed by breathing outdoor air where coal, oil, or gas is burned. You may also be exposed if you touch material that forms on the outside of your car battery.

### **What are the short-term symptoms of sulfuric acid?**

The effects of exposure will depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed. The symptoms are shortness of breath, sore throat, blisters and skin burns, blurred vision, pain, stomach ache, nausea, vomiting, shock or collapse which can result in death.

### **What are the long-term health effects of exposure to sulfuric acid?**

There is risk of tooth erosion upon repeated prolonged exposure. People who have breathed large quantities of sulfuric acid at work have shown an increase in cancers of the larynx.

### **How can sulfuric acid affect children?**

Children may have increased sensitivity to sulfuric acid in air, due to their smaller airway diameters and that they breathe in more air than adults.

### **What should I do if sulfuric acid has been released?**

Listen to your local authority for instructions, you may have to shelter-in-place (remain in place and protect yourself there) or evacuate.

**What should I do if I think I have been exposed to sulfuric acid?**

There are no medical tests to determine whether you have been exposed to sulfuric acid.

If you think you have been exposed, move quickly to an area where fresh air is available. Remove your contaminated clothes by cutting them off the body; if possible do not pull the clothes over the head. Quickly wash your entire body with lots of soap and water. If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse them with plain water for 15 to 20 minutes. If you wear contact lenses, remove them before rinsing your eyes.

If you wear glasses, wash them with soap and water. You can put your eyeglasses back on after you wash them. Place your contaminated clothes and contact lenses into a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. ***Do not induce vomiting.*** Give plenty of water to drink.

***Call 911 right away for medical attention and removal of the contaminated items. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.***

**Where can I get more information on sulfuric acid?**

[www.inchem.org/](http://www.inchem.org/)

[www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov)

**Source of information:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry  
International Programme on Chemical Safety