

# Use of Compressed Air for Cleaning Operations



Compressed air is readily available at many workplaces. And it's highly effective in cleaning off dusty surfaces, machinery and even clothing and PPE. The problem is that cleaning with compressed air is also highly dangerous. The high-pressure air jet can directly injure the eyes and face, as well as throw off dusts and debris that cause the same result. The danger becomes exponentially greater when compressed air is used to remove or near asbestos and other substances that become hazardous when airborne. That's why most jurisdictions ban or severely restrict use of compressed air for cleaning operations. Here's a rundown of the rules in each part of Canada.

Jurisdiction	Rules for Cleaning with Compressed Air
Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*No use of compressed air, gas or steam for blowing dust or other substances from structures, machinery or materials if: (a) person may be directly exposed to the jet; (b) a fire, explosion, injury or health hazard is likely to result; or (c) use would cause unsafe concentration of an airborne chemical agent (<i>COHS Regs.</i>, Sec. 10.21)</li><li>*No use of compressed air to clean clothing contaminated with (a) asbestos; (b) an airborne substance above ACGIH TLV exposure limit; or (c) a hazardous substance with exposure limit lower than 1 mg/m<sup>3</sup> (Sec. 10.22(1))</li><li>*If compressed air used to clean contaminated clothing: (a) appropriate eye protection required; and (b) compressed air pressure in pipeline can't exceed 69 kPa (10 psi) or use of a safety nozzle limiting air pressure to 69kPa (10 psi) is required (Sec. 10.22(2))</li><li>*No use of compressed air to dry-remove friction material dust from automotive assemblies for automotive servicing if worker may be exposed to asbestos (Sec. 10.26.3)</li></ul>
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No use of compressed air to blow dust or other substances from clothing (<i>OHS Code</i>, Sec. 171(8)(d))</li></ul>

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British Columbia	<p>*No use of compressed air or steam for blowing dust, chips or other substances from equipment, materials and structures if person may be exposed to the jet or material it expelled or propelled and likely cause an injury or health hazard due to fire, explosion or other cause (<i>OHS Reg.</i>, Sec. 4.42(1))</p> <p>*No use of compressed air for blowing harmful or hazardous dusts or other harmful substances from workers' clothing except in specially designated areas, provided that: (a) the exposure limit of the substances is greater than 1.0 mg/m<sup>3</sup>; (b) appropriate respirators and eye protection are worn; and (c) compressed air supply pressure is limited to 70 kPa gauge (10 psig), or a safety nozzle with same pressure limiting effect is used (Sec. 4.42(2)+(4))</p> <p>*No use of compressed air for cleaning up or removing asbestos dust or debris, or dry sweeping or dry mopping of asbestos waste (Sec. 6.9(4))</p> <p>*No use of compressed air to dry-remove friction material dust from automotive assemblies for automotive servicing if worker may be exposed to asbestos (Sec. 6.24)</p> <p>*No use of compressed air, blowers, compressed gas or dry sweeping cleaning methods in areas where lead processes are conducted (Sec. 6.65)</p> <p>*No use of compressed air, blowers, dry sweeping or dry mopping to clean up or remove "RCS dust," i.e., respirable crystalline silica, -quartz or cristobalite (Sec. 6.112.6)</p>
Manitoba	<p>No use of compressed air to clean up asbestos-containing material (<i>WSH Reg.</i>, Sec. 37.9(1))</p> <p>*OK to use compressed air to clean surfaces, provided that: (a) a blowpipe is installed on end of the hose; (b) a control valve is part of the blowpipe; and (c) employee using compressed air wears appropriate protective equipment (<i>OHS Gen. Reg.</i>, Sec. 254(1))</p>
New Brunswick	<p>*OK to use compressed air to blow dust and other substances from employees' clothing, provided that: (a) employee uses appropriate eye protection equipment; and (b) either: (i) the compressed air supply is limited to 69 kPa; or (ii) safety nozzles having the same pressure limiting effect are used (Sec. 254(2))</p>
Newfoundland & Labrador	<p>No use of compressed air to clean clothes, machinery, work benches or floors (<i>OHS Regs.</i>, Sec. 37)</p> <p>OK to use compressed air (defined as air at absolute pressure greater than 275 kPa) to clean a surface or person, provided that device used to deliver the air is (a) commercially manufactured + approved in manufacturer's specifications for purpose of cleaning a surface or person with compressed air; or (b) certified by an engineer as adequate for purpose of cleaning a surface or person with compressed air (<i>OHS Regs.</i>, Sec. 101)</p>
Nova Scotia	<p>No use of compressed air to clean up and remove dust from any surface at any project, building or work subject* to <i>OHS Reg. Designated Subst. Asbestos on Const. Projects and in Building and Repair Ops.</i> (Sec. 10)</p>
Prince Edward Island	<p>Not specifically addressed</p>

Jurisdiction	Rules for Cleaning with Compressed Air
Qu <sup>é</sup> bec	<p>*No use of compressed air to clean a person (<i>OHS Regs.</i>, Sec. 325)</p> <p>*OK to use compressed air to clean a machine or piece of equipment, provided that pressure of air is less than 200 kPa (unless the cleaning is carried out in an enclosure specially designed for abrasive air blasting and equipped with a vacuum system) (Sec. 326)</p> <p>*No use of compressed air in a work area of construction site where work is liable to produce asbestos dust emissions (<i>Safety Code for Const.</i>, Sec. 3.23.5)</p>
Saskatchewan	<p>No use of compressed air directed towards a worker for cleaning worker's clothing or PPE or for any other purpose if use of compressed air may disperse harmful contaminants into the air (<i>OHS Regs.</i>, Sec. 27)</p>
Northwest Territories and Nunavut	<p>No use of compressed air directed towards a worker for cleaning worker's clothing or PPE or for any other purpose if use of compressed air may disperse harmful contaminants into the air (<i>OHS Regs.</i>, Sec. 26)</p>
Yukon	Not specifically addressed

**Notes:**

\*The Ontario *Designated Subst. Asbestos on Const. Projects and in Building and Repair Ops.* covers: (a) every project, its owner, and every constructor, employer and worker engaged in or on the project; (b) the repair, alteration or maintenance of a building, the owner of the building, and every employer and worker engaged in the repair, alteration or maintenance; (c) every building in which material that may be asbestos-containing material has been used, and the owner of the building; (d) the demolition of machinery, equipment, aircraft, ships, locomotives, railway cars and vehicles, and every employer and worker engaged in the demolition; and (e) subject to subsection (3), (i) work described in subsection (2) in which asbestos-containing material is likely to be handled, dealt with, disturbed or removed, and (ii) every employer and worker engaged in the work