SODIUM HYDROXIDE

This dossier on sodium hydroxide presents the most critical studies pertinent to the risk assessment of sodium hydroxide in its use in drilling muds, hydraulic fracturing fluids and water treatment systems. It does not represent an exhaustive or critical review of all available data. The information presented in this dossier was obtained from the OECD-SIDS documents on sodium hydroxide (OECD, 2002a, b) and the ECHA database that provides information on chemicals that have been registered under the EU REACH (ECHA). Where possible, study quality was evaluated using the Klimisch scoring system (Klimisch et al., 1997).

Screening Assessment Conclusion – Sodium hydroxide is classified as a **tier 1** chemical and requires a hazard assessment only.

1 BACKGROUND

Sodium hydroxide (NaOH) is a strong alkaline substance that dissociates completely in water to sodium (Na+) and hydroxyl (OH-) ions. Both ions are ubiquitous in the environment. Na+ and OH- ions will not adsorb on the particulate matter or surfaces and will not accumulate in living tissues. Sodium hydroxide dissociates completely in aqueous solutions to sodium (Na+) and hydroxyl (OH-) ions. Sodium is an essential nutrient involved in fluid and electrolyte balance and is required for normal cellular function. The hazard of NaOH for aquatic organisms is caused by the hydroxyl ion (OH-) which has the potential to increase the pH of the aquatic environment, depending on the buffering capacity.

2 CHEMICAL NAME AND IDENTIFICATION

Chemical Name (IUPAC): Sodium hydroxide

CAS RN: 1310-73-2

Molecular formula: HNaO

Molecular weight: 40 g/mol

Synonyms: Caustic soda, soda lye, NaOH

3 PHYSICO-CHEMICAL PROPERTIES

Key physical and chemical properties for the substance are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview of the Physico-Chemical Properties of Sodium Hydroxide

Property	Value	Klimisch score	Reference
Physical state at 20°C and 101.3 kPa	Solid	2	Lide, 2009; ECHA
Melting Point	318°C (solid, 100%); 52°C (60% solution)	2	ECHA
Boiling Point	1,388°C @ 101.3 kPa	2	Lide, 2009; ECHA

Property	Value	Klimisch score	Reference
Density	2130 kg/m^3, 20°C (100%) 1430 kg/m^3, 20°C (40%)	2	Lide, 2009; ECHA
Vapour Pressure	1 Pa @ 513°C	2	Lide, 2009; ECHA
Partition Coefficient (log Kow)	Not applicable	-	-
Water Solubility	Very soluble (>10 g/L @ 25°C)	2	Lide, 2009; ECHA
Dissociation Constant (pKa)	14.8 @ 25°C	2	Lide, 2009; ECHA

Sodium hydroxide (NaOH) is a strong alkaline substance that dissociates completely in water to sodium (Na^+) and hydroxyl (OH^-) ions.

4 DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL REGULATORY INFORMATION

A review of international and national environmental regulatory information was undertaken (Table 2). This chemical is listed on the Australian Inventory of Chemical Substances – AICS (Inventory). No conditions for its use were identified. No specific environmental regulatory controls or concerns were identified within Australia and internationally for sodium hydroxide.

NICNAS has assessed sodium hydroxide in an IMAP Tier 1 assessment and concluded that it poses no unreasonable risk to the environment[1] .

Table 2 Existing International Controls

Convention, Protocol or other international control	Listed Yes or No?
Montreal Protocol	No
Synthetic Greenhouse Gases (SGG)	No
Rotterdam Convention	No
Stockholm Convention	No
REACH (Substances of Very High Concern)	No
United States Endocrine Disrupter Screening Program	No
European Commission Endocrine Disruptors Strategy	No

5 ENVIRONMENTAL FATE SUMMARY

Due to its high water solubility and low vapour pressure, sodium hydroxide will be found predominantly in the aquatic environment where it dissociates completely to sodium (Na^+) and hydroxyl (OH^-) ions. Both ions are ubiquitous in the environment (UNEP, 1995).

[1] https://www.industrialchemicals.gov.au/chemical-information/search-assessments?assessmentcasnumber=1310-73-2%2C+

The addition of sodium hydroxide to an aquatic ecosystem may increase the pH depending on the buffer capacity of the receiving water. In general, the buffer capacity is regulated by the equilibria between CO_2, HCO_3^- and CO_3^{2-}:

$CO_2 + H_2O \leftrightarrow HCO_3^- + H^+$ ($pKa_1 = 6.35$)
$HCO_3^- \leftrightarrow CO_3^{2-} + H^+$ ($pKa_2 = 10.33$)

A release of sodium hydroxide into the aquatic environment from the use of NaOH could potentially increase the sodium concentration and the pH in the aquatic environment. Table 3 shows the concentration of sodium hydroxide needed to increase the pH to values of 9.0, 10.0, 11.0 and 12.0.

Table 3 Sodium Hydroxide Concentration (mg/L) Needed to Increase pH (DeGroot et al., 2002; taken from OECD, 2002b)

Buffer capacity*	Final pH			
	9.0	10.0	11.0	12.0
0 mg/L HCO_3 (distilled water)	0.4	4.0	40	400
20 mg/L HCO_3 (10^{th} percentile of 77 rivers)	1.0	8.2	51	413
106 mg/L HCO_3^- (mean value of 77 rivers)	3.5	26	97	468
195 mg/L HCO_3^- (90^{th} percentile of 77 rivers)	6.1	45	145	525

*The initial pH of a bicarbonate solution with a concentration of 20-195 mg/L was 8.25 to 8.35.

Na^+ and OH^- ions will not adsorb on the particulate matter or surfaces and will not accumulate in living tissues (OECD, 2002b).

6 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS SUMMARY

A. Aquatic Toxicity

The OECD-SIDS SIAR on NaOH states that while the toxicity of the NaOH has been assumed to be related to the hydroxyl anion, in general a pH change could influence the speciation of other chemicals and therefore increase and/or decrease toxicity of the substance.

There are no guideline studies on NaOH; the studies summarised below have Klimisch scores of 3 or 4.

Acute Fish

The 24-hour LC_{50} to *Carassius auratus* (goldfish) is 160 mg/L. At 100 mg/L, which was equivalent to a pH of 9.8, no mortality was observed. The 48-hour LC_{50} to *Leuciscus idus melanotus*, is 189 mg/L. The 96-hour LC_{50} of *Gambusia affinis* (mosquitofish) is 125 mg/L. At 84 mg/L, no effects on the fish were observed. The pH was 9 at 100 mg/L.

Acute Invertebrate

The 48-hour LC_{50} is 40 mg/L for *Ceriodaphnia cf. dubia*. The toxicity threshold concentration of NaOH for *Daphnia magna* was reported to range from 40 to 240 mg/L.

Acute Algae

No studies were identified.

B. Terrestrial Toxicity

No studies were identified.

7 CATEGORISATION AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF CONCERN

A. PBT Categorisation

The methodology for the Persistent, Bioaccumulative and Toxic (PBT) substances assessment is based on the Australian and EU REACH Criteria methodology (DEWHA, 2009; ECHA, 2008).

Sodium hydroxide is an inorganic salt that dissociates completely to sodium and hydroxide ions in aqueous solutions. Biodegradation is not applicable to these inorganic ions; both sodium and hydroxide ions are also ubiquitous and are present in most water, soil and sediment. For the purposes of this PBT assessment, the persistent criteria are not considered applicable to this inorganic salt.

Sodium and hydroxide ions are essential to all living organisms, and their intracellular and extracellular concentrations are actively regulated. Thus, sodium hydroxide is not expected to bioaccumulate and does not meet the screening criteria for bioaccumulation.

No chronic toxicity data exist on sodium hydroxide; however, the acute EC_{50} values are >1 mg/L in fish, invertebrates and algae. Thus, sodium hydroxide does not meet the screening criteria for toxicity.

The overall conclusion is that sodium hydroxide is not a PBT substance.

B. Other Characteristics of Concern

No other characteristics of concern were identified for sodium hydroxide.

8 SCREENING ASSESSMENT

Chemical Name	CAS No.	Overall PBT Assessment [1]	Chemical Databases of Concern Assessment Step		Persistence Assessment Step		Bioaccumulative Assessment Step	Toxicity Assessment Step			Risk Assessment Actions Required[3]
			Listed as a COC on relevant databases?	Identified as Polymer of Low Concern	P criteria fulfilled?	Other P Concerns	B criteria fulfilled?	T criteria fulfilled?	Acute Toxicity [2]	Chronic Toxicity[2]	
Sodium Hydroxide	1310-73-2	Not a PBT	No	No	NA	No	No	No	1	1	1

Footnotes:

1 - PBT Assessment based on PBT Framework.

2 - Acute and chronic aquatic toxicity evaluated consistent with assessment criteria (see Framework).

3 – Tier 1 – Hazard Assessment only.

Notes:

NA = not applicable

PBT = Persistent, Bioaccumulative and Toxic

B = bioaccumulative

P = persistent

T = toxic

9 REFERENCES, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A. References

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A. Abbreviations and Acronyms

°C	degrees Celsius
AICS	Australian Inventory of Chemical Substances
COC	constituent of concern
DEWHA	Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
ECHA	European Chemicals Agency
EU	European Union
g/L	grams per litre
IUPAC	International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry

kg/m^3	kilogram per cubic metre
kPa	kilopascal
LC	lethal concentration
mg/L	milligrams per litre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Pa	pascal
PBT	Persistent, Bioaccumulative and Toxic
REACH	Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals
SIAR	SIDS Initial Assessment Report
SGG	Synthetic Greenhouse Gases
SIDS	Screening Information Data Set