

Products We Use: What you should know

Sarah Becketl, CPX • Product Research Director

Odorless mineral spirits

Many colored pencil artists use solvents as a blending tool or to create more painterly effects. Odorless mineral spirits (OMS) is a popular choice, but it is important for artists to be knowledgeable about these products and to choose one that is appropriate for their working methods and studio setup. Some tips to keep in mind when you're purchasing and using OMS:

- **OMS is a purified version of mineral spirits with most, or all, of the harmful, aromatic solvents removed.** Look for a highly purified, artist-grade OMS that has had all of the aromatic vapors removed and is completely odor free.
- **Be aware that OMS is a volatile substance, which means that it evaporates into the air.** When using a highly purified OMS, this is easy to forget, since there is no smell. In a hot environment, OMS will evaporate faster, so it is best to work in a climate-controlled space with good ventilation. Also, by pouring out only the smallest quantity of OMS needed, and keeping larger containers closed, you will keep evaporation to a minimum.
- **Permissible exposure level (PEL) is an OSHA rating that indicates the maximum amount of a substance that a person can be exposed to**



Pour out only a small quantity of solvent, and keep larger containers closed to keep evaporation to a minimum.

without harm. When talking about OMS, the PEL refers to parts per million (ppm) evaporating into the air. In general, a higher PEL indicates a milder solvent and a slower evaporation rate. Only a mild solvent is needed for use with colored pencil, so you'll want to choose an OMS that has a PEL in the range of 300 or higher. Remember, as the PEL increases, the evaporation rate slows, so you may find that an OMS with a very high PEL dries too slowly for your preference. You may want to test a few different artist-grade OMS's to find the one that's the right fit for your working methods.

- **OMS will not be absorbed into the body through healthy skin, but it can enter the body through damaged or broken skin.** As cuts and nicks tend to come with the territory of being an artist, you may want to wear gloves (rubber, vinyl, latex, etc.) when working with OMS.
- **All OMS is flammable, but different products have different flash points.** The flash point of a material is the lowest temperature in which vapors can be ignited with a flame or spark; so the higher the flash point, the less flammable a substance is. Choose an OMS with a high flash point and keep your OMS away from sources of heat.
- **Always read the label/instructions on any art materials that you use, as well as reading the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).** This gives you valuable information about how to properly handle, store, and clean up materials; as well as information about toxicity and potential health risks. You can find the MSDS on the manufacturer's website, art supply websites, or by requesting it from the manufacturer.



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Information for this article came from Gamblin Artists Colors (www.gamblincolors.com), and from *The Painter's Handbook* by Mark David Gottsegen.

The Painter's Handbook is a great resource for any artist to have in their library. Although many chapters focus on painting rather than drawing mediums (such as colored pencil), there are chapters dedicated to solvents, pigments, varnishes, conservation, and many other topics that apply to all artists.

At the end of the day, each artist's health and safety is their own responsibility, so it's extremely important that we all understand and properly handle the art materials we use.

Which solvents and blenders are acceptable for the CPSA International Exhibition?

Artists are constantly developing new ways to apply, blend, and manipulate colored pencil, and CPSA has recently received multiple questions regarding which solvents and blenders are eligible for use in artwork entered into the International Exhibition. We have better articulated our policy regarding the use of solvents and blenders into the statement below:

- Solvents such as odorless mineral spirits and alcohol may be used to dissolve and blend colored pencil.
- Colorless blenders that are composed of predominantly wax, oil, and/or binders may be used in thin layers to blend colored pencil. Products that are a combination of waxes and solvent,

such as cold wax medium, may also be used in thin layers to blend and dissolve colored pencil. Colorless blenders may not be applied in thick layers (over 1/16") or be used to significantly alter the surface texture of a colored pencil piece.

- **NOTE:** Blenders that are designed for use with oil paint sticks contain linseed oil, which is acidic. Therefore, these blenders should only be used on surfaces that have an appropriate primer or ground to protect the substrate from deterioration. Please remember that entries for the International Exhibition may only be completed on manufacturer-prepared surfaces.

The statement above includes not only colored pencil colorless blenders, but also:

- oil pastel colorless blenders
- oil paint stick colorless blenders
- cold wax medium

Some of these products have traditionally been thought of as painting mediums, but all of them are designed to do the same thing as a traditional colored pencil colorless blender: to blend color without adding any additional pigment.



Cold wax mediums contain a combination of beeswax, solvent, and other waxes or resins (depending on the brand.) It has a paste consistency, and due to the solvent content, can be used to dissolve and blend colored pencil.

Although each blender product has a unique texture and consistency, they are all composed of similar ingredients: a combination of waxes, oils, and binders.

Since it would be difficult or impossible to distinguish which products were used when looking at a finished colored pencil piece, CPSA has decided that all of these products should be eligible for use.

This statement has been added to the complete list of “**Acceptable Products for the International Exhibition**” page on the CPSA website.

To access this list, go to www.cpsa.org, click on the “**Show Requirements**” tab located under “**Shows/Events**,” and then click on the link for “**acceptable products**.”