

Knowledge is Empowerment

- Hazard Communication -

Use of chemicals in the workplace

Chemicals are an everyday part of the working environment. There are more than 650,000 hazardous chemical products, with hundreds of new ones being introduced annually. These chemical materials range from common toner in office copying machines to exotic specialized chemicals requiring extreme safety and health protections. The type, quantity, and hazards associated with a chemical material are dependent on its ingredients, work application, and function.

What is the Hazard Communication Standard?

In 1994 the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) finalized a comprehensive standard which requires that information be made available to workers for the chemical products they maybe exposed to or use. The Hazard Communication standard put requirements in place for everyone who handles a chemical, from the manufacturer through the end user. Its purpose is to provide information to employers and workers with the goal of reducing illnesses and injuries caused by chemicals.

What are the Manufacturer's and Employer's responsibilities?

Manufacturers are responsible to test each chemical product they develop to determine if it poses a health or safety hazard to the user. The results of the testing are documented in the form of a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) which is supplied to all users. Employers who purchase and use chemicals also have responsibilities under the Hazard Communication standard. Employers must have a written program, document the chemical materials in the workplace, educate workers about the Hazard Communication standard and how it is implemented, educate workers to understand MSDSs and chemical labels, and train workers to safely use the chemicals required by their jobs.

How do I know what chemical materials are present in the workplace and how to use them safely?

- Container labels are the first line of defense against unsafe chemical use. Labels applied by the manufacturer include the name of the chemicals found in the product, the manufacturer's contact information, the physical hazards associated with each chemical, storage instructions, health hazards, and basic protection procedures.
- Material Safety Data Sheets contain detailed information about physical hazards associated with chemicals found in the product, safety procedures, and emergency response techniques. They document the name of the product and its hazardous ingredients, physical and chemical characteristics, physical hazards, reactivity, health hazards, precautions for safe use and handling, and control measures.
- A Hazardous Material Chemical Inventory List which documents chemicals being used or stored must be maintained. Required information includes type, quantity, location, and MSDS documentation.
- Materials Safety Data Sheets and hazardous materials inventory lists must be readily available in offices and on work sites.

Where can you get more information?

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/hazardcommunications/>

Section 5.10 of the Subcontractor Environment, Safety, and Health Program (Rev. 2) details the requirements for general contractors.