

HAZARD COMMUNICATION

Protecting Your Health and Safety

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) established the Hazard communication Standard to protect the health and safety of employees. The OSHA Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) is based on a simple concept - that employees have both a need and a right to know the hazards and identities of the chemicals they are exposed to when working. "HazCom" is the best way for an employee to find out about the danger of exposure to chemicals in their workplace. Employees can also find out how to protect themselves and co-workers from the dangers that may be present.

Employers need to know what potential hazardous chemicals their employees may be exposed to. When employers have information about the chemicals being used, they can take steps to reduce exposures, substitute less hazardous materials, and establish proper work practices. These efforts will help prevent the occurrence of work-related illnesses and injuries caused by chemicals.

The Hazard Communication Standard requires information to be prepared and transmitted regarding all hazardous chemicals. This covers both physical hazards (such as flammability), and health hazards (such as irritation, lung damage, and cancer). Most chemicals used in the workplace have some hazard potential, and thus will be covered by the rule.

Hazard Communication can help prevent disabling injuries, serious illness, even death due to explosions, fires, other accidents, or overexposure to chemicals. If you don't work in a chemical or manufacturing company, you may think that you are not at risk. There are hazard risks in most work environments. You are, or can be exposed to chemicals such as: cleaning solvents, pesticides, gasoline, and even toner in your office copy machine can be harmful if the chemicals are mishandled. Paying attention to your company's "HazCom" program is always important to you. A manufacturer may change the formula of a chemical that you have used before without your knowledge, or you may start working with a new chemical.

Chemical manufacturers, importers, and distributors of hazardous chemicals are all required to provide the appropriate labels and material safety data sheets to the employers to which they ship the chemicals. The information is to be provided automatically. Every container of hazardous chemicals you receive must be labeled, tagged, or marked with the required information. Your suppliers must also send you a properly completed Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) at the time of the first shipment of the chemical, and with the next shipment after the MSDS is updated with new and significant information about the hazards.

Upon receiving MSDS, a copy should be immediately given to the department supervisor. Each employee within the department should familiarize themselves with the information provided on the MSDS.

The Three Important Elements of any company's Hazard Communication Program are: 1.) Warning labels on containers, 2.) Material Safety Data Sheets, 3.) Employee training on the proper handling, usage, storage, and transportation of chemicals.

Written Hazard Communication Program

All workplaces where employees are exposed to hazardous chemicals must have a written plan which describes how the standard will be implemented in that facility. Preparation of a plan is not just a paper exercise - all of the elements must be implemented in the workplace in order to be in compliance with the rule.

The plan does not have to be lengthy or complicated. It is intended to be an assurance that all aspects of the requirements have been addressed. Your company's program must let you know things such as:

- When and how your next training will take place
- What MSDS tell you and where they are located
- The names of hazardous chemicals in each work area
- How to obtain a written copy of your company's own HazCom Program and the official OSHA HazCom Standard.
- How site evaluations will be performed
- Which protective measures and equipment are required or suggested for each chemical
- How outside contractors will be trained
- Special procedures for occasional hazards and unlabeled pipes
- Results of chemical manufacturers' reviews of scientific studies on each chemical

Checklist for Compliance

The following checklist will help to ensure you are in compliance with the Hazard Communication Standard:

- Obtained a copy of the rule. _____
- Read and understood the requirements. _____
- Assigned responsibility for tasks. _____
- Prepared an inventory of chemicals. _____
- Ensured containers are labeled. _____
- Obtained MSDS for each chemical. _____
- Prepared written program. _____
- Made MSDSs available to workers. _____
- Conducted training of workers. _____
- Established procedures to maintain current program. _____
- Established procedures to evaluate effectiveness. _____

You and your employer are partners in protecting you against chemical hazards in your workplace. Your responsibilities begin with carefully reading the important information on all labels, MSDS, and training materials which your employer gives you. If you don't understand something, ask your supervisor to explain it.

Your health and safety in the future may depend on your following the correct procedures now!!