

Hazardous chemicals are present in nearly every organization, from the solvents produced at large chemical companies to the desk cleaner used in office buildings. The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) regulations state that all employees have the right to know about the hazards of the chemicals to which they are exposed at work, what measures they can use to protect themselves from those exposures and how they should react if an exposure incident occurs. In order to achieve these goals, a hazard communication program should be developed and presented to all employees.

Safety Data Sheets

Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are the primary tool chemical manufacturers use to describe the hazards of the chemical to the end user. It is important that the SDS are accessible to employees at all times. They should not be kept in locked offices or other restricted areas of the facility, but rather where they can be quickly retrieved in the event of an emergency. Placing the SDS in a bright yellow binder on the wall or on a company's Intranet site are ways to allow immediate access by all employees.

The SDS contain information employees need to work more safely with chemicals. The hazard classification, routes of entry, precautions for safe handling and first aid measures are examples of the types of information provided in each SDS. It is important that all chemicals used in the building are included in the SDS list—even chemicals used by custodians and office employees. SDS binders should be reviewed annually to ensure that new chemicals have been included, obsolete chemicals have been removed and the SDS reflect current chemical usage.

Container Labels

Container labels are an extension of the SDS provided by the chemical manufacturer. Each container of hazardous chemicals in the workplace should be labeled with the identity of the chemical,



a signal word, hazard statement for the chemical, corresponding pictograms, any precautionary statements and the name and address of the chemical manufacturer. This includes chemicals poured from the original container into an unlabeled container, unless they will be used immediately by the employee who transferred them.

Employee Training

The most important part of the hazard communication program is ensuring that all employees are aware of the hazards of chemicals with which they work. OSHA requires that employees receive training at the time of their initial assignment and whenever a new chemical hazard is introduced into their work area. However, employees are not required to be trained on chemicals that are outside their normal work area. (e.g., office employees need not be trained on the hazards of a production chemical unless their job duties may place them in an exposure situation).

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A written hazard communication program should, at a minimum, contain:

- A list of chemicals to which employees are routinely exposed
- The hazards of nonroutine tasks that may be performed by employees•
- What the SDS are, what information they contain and the order it is presented •
- The location(s) and accessibility of the SDS in the workplace
- How to use the hazard information on the SDS to choose personal protective equipment
- An explanation of container labels entering the workplace and the labeling system used in the workplace

All employee training should be documented and include the company name, employee's name, date of training and name of trainer. This documentation should be retained indefinitely.

For Additional Information

Occupational Safety & Health Administration:

www.osha.gov

EMC Insurance Companies: www.emcins.com

- Online Training – Hazard Communication