Hazard Communication (HAZCOM)



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The chemicals you use at work can be hazardous to your health and safety. You need to be prepared so that you can protect yourself and your co-workers from injury or illness. Safety data sheets (SDSs) are prepared by the chemical manufacturer or importer so that you will know how to safely handle the chemicals you are using, what protective equipment you need to use and what steps to take if something does go wrong.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Exposure to the chemicals you use at work can cause injuries or can have toxic effects with a long-term impact on your health and even on your ability to work. In addition to health effects, many chemicals, like solvents, can cause fires or even explosions if not handled properly and in the right type of environment.

EXAMPLE
Solvents are one type of chemical you may use in your job. The effects of solvents include irritation to the skin, eyes and respiratory tract. When inhaled, some solvents, such as toluene, can have neurotoxic effects, such as memory loss or motor impairment.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Read the SDS for each chemical before you use it for the first time. Review it as needed. Your company will have written material safety data sheets on file. These SDSs can also be accessed on the internet. Follow the directions for use, handling and disposal of the chemicals. Make sure you are aware of what to do in case of a spill or other emergency.

1. THE HAZCOM PROGRAM

Your company should have a complete and comprehensive HAZCOM program. The program should be in writing and should include: a determination of the hazards present in your company, labeling of all chemical containers, training about the hazardous chemicals, an inventory of all of the hazardous chemicals, and material safety data sheets. The program should also cover tasks that involve chemicals, but that are not routine.

2. INFORMING EMPLOYEES

The employer must inform its employees of the hazards of the chemicals they use. This is done by training new employees or whenever new chemicals are brought in for use. Training should be repeated periodically. Other ways of informing employees about hazards include material safety data sheets and labeling of containers that hold chemicals.

FINAL WORD

Your company’s Hazard Communication Program (HAZCOM) can help you learn to use chemicals at work safely. Learn about the program and how to read and understand material safety data sheets and chemical labels.