WHMIS 1988 – For Laboratories Fact Sheets



DO WHMIS LAWS APPLY IN LABORATORIES?

Yes. WHMIS laws apply to the use of controlled products in all Canadian workplaces, including laboratories. Ideally, controlled products (those products that fall under WHMIS laws) used in laboratories will be fully labelled and accompanied by a material safety data sheet (MSDS).

Products that are decanted may require labels. It may also be necessary to label and create MSDSs for products created in the laboratory.

However, some categories of exemptions were created in the WHMIS laws to allow for flexibility for laboratory samples and products from laboratory supply houses. Exemptions were made because persons working in laboratories are typically better informed about the hazards and necessary precautions of the products in their workplace.

What is the exemption for laboratory samples?

The exemption covers laboratory samples which are controlled products, are packaged in containers of less than 10 kilograms, and for which an MSDS has not been obtained or prepared for the product(s). In this case, the label must have the following information (in both English and French):

- The product identifier (name).
- The chemical identity or generic chemical identity of an ingredient of the controlled product, if known.
- The supplier identification.
- The statement “Hazardous Laboratory Sample. For hazard information or in an emergency, call…” and an emergency telephone number.

What is the exemption for laboratory supply houses?

Material safety data sheets are not required for controlled products which are supplied by laboratory supply houses, packaged in containers of less than 10 kilograms, and intended for use in laboratories only. In this case, the label must have the following information:

- The product identification.
- The label must disclose all of the information normally required on the data sheet.
- Risk phrases appropriate to the product.
- Precautionary measures to be followed when handling, using or when exposed to the product.

- First aid measures.

Labels do not require a supplier identification, hazard symbols, nor the “hatched” WHMIS border.

If a product from a laboratory supply house is used outside of a laboratory, then all of the normal WHMIS requirements apply.

Where can I get PSDSs for infectious agents?

Infectious agents are typically only used in laboratories or scientific settings. The Public Health Agency of Canada (Office of Laboratory Security) has prepared Pathogen Safety Data Sheets (PSDSs) [formerly titled MSDS for pathogens] for many of the common infectious agents. Because workers in laboratories are in scientific settings and may be exposed to much higher concentrations of these agents than the general public, the terminology in these safety sheets is technical and detailed. They can be viewed on their web site.

Does WHMIS apply to a product that has mixtures of radioactive nuclides and non-radioactive carrier materials?

Sometimes. WHMIS laws do not apply if:

- The carrier material is present in less than certain amounts (1.0 ml in volume if a liquid or a gas; 1.0 g in weight if a solid).
- The carrier material is not a carcinogen, a toxic or reactive material, or infectious material.
- The carrier material is used in diagnostic or therapeutic procedures approved by Health Canada.
- The radioactive
- nuclide/carrier materials are highly radioactive.

In general, the basis for these exemptions is that the precautions that must be used when handling radioactive materials will provide a considerable safety margin that will cover any precautions that the carrier material may require.

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