

Chemical Safety: Maintaining a Safe Working Environment

Chemicals pose a wide range of health hazards including irritation and carcinogenicity, and physical hazards such as flammability, corrosiveness and reactivity.



OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard is a valuable resource designed to ensure information about these hazards, and associated protective measures, is available in the workplace.

While manufacturing environments are often associated with chemicals and hazardous materials, workers in nearly all industries could potentially come in contact with chemicals. Whether chemicals are in the janitorial closet of a commercial real estate building or the lab in a research facility, the potential risks are the same.

Chemical manufacturers and importers are required to evaluate the hazards of the chemicals they produce or import. They are also obligated to provide information about the chemicals through labels on shipped containers and more-detailed information sheets called Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs). These important pieces of communication help keep everyone informed about the materials they are working with. When people are aware of the chemicals they are exposed to at work, they can effectively participate in their employers' protective programs and take steps to ensure their safety.

To protect yourself from chemical hazards

- › Know where the MSDSs can be found at your work place and how to access them.
- › Learn what you need to do in an emergency with different types of chemicals.
- › If you come across a chemical spill and can not identify the substance, do not touch or move it. Instead, barricade the area and report the spill.
- › If you come into direct contact with a chemical, wash your hands with warm, soapy water immediately.
- › Never take a hazardous chemical out of its original container and store it in something else.
- › Do not combine two different types of chemicals.
- › When handling chemicals, wear protective equipment such as a mask and gloves.
- › Always dispose of chemicals properly.

Characteristics of chemical hazardous substances

- › Corrosive – Wears away at many types of materials.
- › Flammable – Easily ignites.
- › Reactive – Can cause an explosion or produce deadly vapors.
- › Toxic – Poisonous to humans and animals.

It is vital to become familiar with the location of the MSDSs and other safety information in order to keep yourself and others protected from perilous chemicals. Remember, the best way to avoid harm is to maintain a standard of safety in the workplace. This requires awareness from all employees before an incident occurs.

For more information on chemical safety...

US Department of Energy:

www.hss.energy.gov

OSHA Hazard Communications:

www.osha.gov/SLTC/hazardcommunications/index.html



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