

SAFETY MATTERS

HAZARD COMMUNICATION

OSHA estimates that more than 32 million workers are exposed to 650,000 hazardous chemical products in more than three million American workplaces. This poses a serious problem for exposed employees.

The basic goal of an effective hazard communication program is to ensure workers know the identities and hazards of chemicals in their workplaces. When employers and employees have such information, it can be used to design and implement appropriate protective measures.



What is Hazard Communication?

Chemicals pose a wide range of health hazards (such as skin irritation, chronic dermatitis, and the potential to cause cancer) and physical hazards (such as flammability, corrosion and reactivity).

OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard is designed to ensure that information about these hazards and associated protective measures is disseminated.

This is accomplished by requiring chemical manufacturers and importers to evaluate the hazards of chemicals they produce or import, and to provide information about them through labels on shipped containers, and more detailed information sheets called material safety data sheets (MSDSs).



All employers with hazardous chemicals in their workplaces must prepare and implement a written hazard communication program, and must ensure that all containers are labeled, employees are provided access to MSDSs, and an effective training program is conducted for all potentially exposed employees.

The Hazard Communication Standard provides people with the right to know the hazards and identities of the chemicals they are exposed to in the workplace. When employees have this information, they can effectively participate in their employers' safety programs and take steps to protect themselves. In addition, the standard gives employers the information they need to design and implement an effective safety program for employees potentially exposed to hazardous chemicals. Together, these actions may result in a reduction of chemical source illnesses and injuries in American workplaces.

What Chemicals are Covered by the Hazard Communication Standard?

All hazardous chemicals are covered by this standard. Some hazardous chemicals cause or contribute to direct health effects such as heart ailments, lung damage, cancer and rashes, among others. Other chemicals are safety hazards and have the potential to cause fires, explosions and other serious accidents. And some chemicals are both health *and* safety hazards.

Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)

A Material Safety Data Sheet is a detailed information bulletin, prepared by the manufacturer or importer of a chemical, that describes the following:

- Physical and chemical properties
- Physical and health hazards
- Routes of exposure
- Precautions for safe handling and use
- Emergency and first-aid procedures
- Control measures.



MSDS sheets must be available for each chemical that poses a physical or health hazard. The sheets should be located in close proximity where chemicals are used or stored, and allow easy access to employees in the event of an emergency.

MSDS sheets must be updated, and training must be conducted with employees, each time a new chemical is introduced into the work area.

