

Hazard Communication FactSheet

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Your Right to Know About Chemical Hazards in the Work Place Hazard Communication Overview

There are an estimated 575,000 chemical products used, imported, or produced in the United States. Therefore, Americans are exposed to chemicals on a daily basis. Hazardous chemical exposure can cause or contribute to many serious health effects such as heart disease, kidney and lung damage, sterility, cancer, burns, and skin rashes. Some chemicals may also be safety hazards and have the potential to cause fire, explosions, and other serious accidents. Exposure to chemicals poses a serious problem for employers and their workers.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Hazard Communication Act, §1910.1020, ensures that the hazards of all chemicals produced or imported are evaluated, and that information concerning their hazards is transmitted to employers and employees. The transmittal of information is accomplished by implementing a comprehensive hazard communication (HazCom) program, which includes container labeling and other forms of warning, materials safety data sheets, and employee training. HazCom is referred to as the “Right to Know” standard. The HazCom standard establishes uniform requirements to make sure the hazards of all chemicals in the workplace are evaluated and the information is passed on to affected workers. The program ensures that all employers receive the information they need to inform and train their employees properly and to design and implement employee protective programs.

Chemical Manufacturers Must:

- determine the hazards of each product; and
- communicate information to customers through labels and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).

Employers Must:

- identify and list chemicals in the workplace;
- obtain MSDS's and labels for each chemical; and
- develop written programs that include chemical lists, labels, MSDS's, personal protective equipment (PPE), and employee training.



Employees Must:

- comply with all elements of the HazCom program by following the warnings and cautions on MSDS's and on chemical labels; and
- wear and maintain required PPE.

Employee Training

Employee training plans must include general and site-specific information:

- how the HazCom program is implemented;
- hazards of the chemicals in the area;
- measures employees can take to protect themselves;
- location and use of PPE, if required; and
- methods and observations workers can use to detect the presence of a chemical.

Labels and Warnings

Each container must be labeled, tagged, or marked with the identity of the chemical contained, and must show appropriate hazard warnings. Labels must be legible, in English, and prominently displayed.

Material Safety Data Sheets

Chemical manufacturers must develop an MSDS for each chemical they produce or import. The MSDS must be provided automatically at the time of the initial shipment of the product. Each MSDS must be in English and include information regarding the chemical identity. Information must be provided on the characteristics, both physical and chemical; known acute and chronic health effects and related health information; exposure limits; whether the chemical is considered to be a carcinogen; precautionary measures; emergency and first-aid procedures; and the identification of the organization that prepared the MSDS.

Summary

The HazCom program ensures that employees are aware of chemicals in the workplace. Each employee, whether they directly or indirectly work near chemicals, must become familiar with the HazCom program. It is your “Right to Know.”

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of

Workers' Compensation has programs to assist employers available at www.tdi.state.tx.us under "Safety Resources."

- Hazard Communication Safety Training Program
- Hazard Communication Sample OSHA Written Program
- Hazard Communication Workplace Program

Remember to practice safety, don't learn it by accident.

This fact sheet was published with information from the Houston, Texas Parks and Recreation Department; the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) and is considered factual at development.