

# Hazard Communication/Right to Know

(see also Labels, Material Safety Data Sheets, Preventing Chemical Contamination)

## Meeting Objectives

To review the basic elements of the Hazard Communication Standard and the availability and location of hazard communication information. The result should be greater understanding of the purpose and application of the Standard and increased use of the safety tools it provides.

## Suggested Materials to Have on Hand

- Sample labels
- Sample MSDS
- Written Hazard Communication Program.

## Introduction/Overview

Chemicals are certainly useful, on the job and off. But as we all know by now, many chemicals are hazardous to your health if you are exposed to too much of them or if the exposure is too direct.

Our safety training programs provide you with information on these chemicals and with procedures and equipment that reduce the chance of exposure. But to make sure everyone gets that kind of information and protection, and to provide a uniform way of delivering it, OSHA came up with the Hazard Communication Standard. The basic point of the Standard is that you have a right to know about hazards you face on the job and how to protect yourself against them.

You've all had the training required by the Standard, but this subject is so important that we're going to review it today. We want to be sure that you're comfortable with your knowledge of the chemical hazards here and that you know how to go about reducing the risk they pose to you.

## General Hazards

The Hazard Communication Standard is specifically concerned with chemical hazards—the chemical's physical and health risks to people.

A chemical may have three basic physical hazards:

- 1 . Fire. You have to know if a chemical could, in a liquid, gas, or vapor form, catch fire and under what circumstances.
- 2 . Explosion. You also have to know if there are circumstances under which a

chemical might explode.

3. **Reactivity.** This is the potential of a chemical to catch fire or explode if it's combined with other chemicals or with water or air. You need to know what the chemical should be kept away from and what situations to avoid.

You also have a right to know about any health hazards, which can be anything from a skin rash to lung cancer.

The Standard makes sure you are informed about the possible health hazards of any given chemical, the symptoms to watch out for, and any existing medical condition that the chemical might make worse.

## **OSHA Regulations and Frequent Violations**

The Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) is a very detailed regulation, which sets out specific requirements for chemical manufacturers, companies that use chemicals, and employees who use chemicals or could be exposed to them in the course of their jobs.

The chemical manufacturers are responsible for determining the physical and health hazards of the products they make and providing that information on container labels and material safety data sheets.

Employers have a number of responsibilities. They must:

- Have a written hazard communication program
- Explain the OSHA Standard, the program, and how it works to employees
- Provide employees with information and training on the hazardous chemicals they use, including their hazards and protective measures to take to use them safely.

Employees have responsibilities under the Standard, too. You are expected to:

- Participate in training
- Read labels and MSDSs and follow safety procedures.

There is no question that OSHA takes the Hazard Communication Standard seriously, and it is trying to get companies to do so, too. In fact, OSHA has for several years issued more citations for not having a written hazard communication program than for any other single violation. See the Violations section for the most recent citations and penalties issued by OSHA under this standard.

## **Identifying Hazards**

The whole purpose of Right to Know is for you to be able to readily identify hazards and know what to do to protect yourself from them.

It's best to assume that any chemical you work with is hazardous unless you can prove otherwise.

And keep in mind that "chemical" is a broad category. Some of the things you use at home are hazardous chemicals, too—including many cleaning solutions, oven cleaners, solvents, etc.

We regularly use a number of hazardous chemicals here, and you should become familiar with them. They include: (list)

(Note: It's a good idea to highlight the most common hazardous chemicals used in the workplace, along with how they're used, and their most serious hazards and most important protections.)

You should be able to identify the hazards of any chemical before you use it with two key Hazard Communication tools:

- Container labels have to provide you with basic information on the chemical's hazards and on the basic procedures and protective equipment you should use when working with it. The label probably also has basic handling and storage instructions and some first-aid information.
- Material safety data sheets have all the details—everything you ever considered knowing about the chemical, its hazards, and instructions for safe handling, use, disposal, and storage. There is also information on what to do if the chemical spills or leaks and first-aid instructions to follow in the event of an accident.

Our material safety data sheets are kept (explain location).

If you want to know more about the Standard and the ways in which this company is complying with it, we have a written hazard communication program that you can review. It's kept (explain location). To review it, speak with (name).

## Protection Against Hazards

Right to Know is valuable because it not only lets you know about hazards, it makes sure you know how to protect yourself from them.

It's important to remember that there is no one sure protection for every chemical. You have to check the label and the MSDS of each chemical you work with so you know what to do to work safely with that chemical.

But there are a few generalities that apply.

- Read the label and MSDS. That way, you know in advance what could go wrong and what to do about it.
- Check the physical hazards. If a chemical has a fire or explosion risk, you want to know the circumstances so you can be sure to avoid them. And if the chemical is reactive, you want to keep it away from other chemicals, or even

air or water, if that's what would cause the dangerous reaction.

- Use the protective and clothing equipment specified on the MSDS. Protective clothing and equipment are the best line of defense between you and the chemical's health hazards. If the danger comes from possible inhalation, you'll need respiratory protection. If there's a splash danger, wear safety goggles. If you want to make sure the chemical doesn't touch your skin, wear the clothing recommended. Be sure to follow the recommendations, though. Gloves or other clothes that may be great protection against one chemical may disintegrate with another.
- Check the handling and storage instructions—and follow them.
- Follow the recommended hygiene practices. If the MSDS tells you to shower after working with the chemical, do it. If it says you need good ventilation when working with that chemical, make sure the area's ventilation is operational before you start the job.
- Know what to do in an emergency. Check that materials you might need to clean up a spill, for instance, are available. Be sure you know who to call and what to do if the worst happens.

There's a lot of protection available for you if you know where to look and what to do. Take advantage of the information and the protective equipment we have to keep yourself and others safe and healthy.

## **Safety Procedures**

Most of what you need to know about the chemicals you work with is on the label and MSDS. But in addition to checking them before any job, there are a few safety basics that apply to all chemicals.

- Follow manufacturer's instructions for chemicals and equipment.
- Follow company procedures on all jobs—no shortcuts!
- Keep chemical containers closed when not in use.
- Check containers regularly for leaks.
- Keep flammable and explosive materials away from heat sources.
- Check protective clothing to be sure there are no rips or tears before putting it on.
- Work with a buddy on any potentially hazardous job.
- Keep food, drinks, and cigarettes out of the work area.
- Wash thoroughly before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- Clean tools, equipment, and clothing that have been exposed to hazardous

chemicals before they're used again.

- Dispose of all contaminated materials properly.

## Suggested Discussion Questions

- 1 . What right does the Hazard Communication Standard give you?
- 2 . What does the Hazard Communication Standard require from chemical manufacturers?
- 3 . What does the Standard require from companies that use chemicals?
- 4 . What does the Standard require from you?
- 5 . What kinds of hazards might a chemical have?
- 6 . What are some of the chemicals we use here and their hazards?
- 7 . Where do you look to find out about a specific chemical's hazards and how to protect yourself from them?
- 8 . What kinds of protection might a particular chemical require?
- 9 . What are some good general chemical safety practices?
- 10 . Are there any other questions?

## Wrap-Up

The Hazard Communication Standard is a very significant regulation for anyone who works with hazardous chemicals.

It ensures, for the first time, that every chemical we get comes with full information on its potential hazards. Even more important, the Standard gives you the right to know how to protect yourself when you work with those chemicals. Between the information provided by the manufacturer on labels and MSDSs, the protective equipment, ventilation, and training our company provides, and your own increased knowledge and understanding, you can feel secure that you really can work with chemicals safely.

Some of you may almost feel that all of this creates a chemical information overload. It can be a lot to take in, but, like most things, it gets easier over time. Don't be embarrassed if you get confused. If you have any questions at any time, ask me. The whole purpose of all of this is for you to be informed and to be safe, and that's not limited to the time you spend in training programs or safety meetings.

The Hazard Communication Standard is a good regulation, but it's only a law. We, as a company, are working hard to provide information, equipment, and procedures that can keep you safe. But only you can make the most of what you're offered. Since the goal of the Standard, and of all our efforts, is to keep you safe and healthy, it's in your best interests to make this a high priority.

## Sample Handout

### **Hazard Communication Standard Checklist**

- Know where the written Hazard Communication Plan is kept.
- Participate actively in hazard communication training.
- Always read labels and MSDSs before starting any job with a hazardous chemical.
- Keep chemical containers closed when not in use.
- Keep the chemical away from situations that could cause it to burn, explode, or have a dangerous reaction with another chemical, air, or water.
- Wear the protective clothing and equipment recommended on the MSDS.
- Check clothing before putting it on to make sure it's in good condition.
- Follow all company procedures on all jobs.
- Follow the handling, storage, and disposal instructions on the MSDS.
- Be aware of possible emergencies that could arise with the chemical and be prepared to handle them.
- Wash before eating, drinking, and smoking if you've been working with a hazardous chemical.
- Ask about any hazards, procedures, equipment recommendations, or emergency response measures you're not sure you understand.

