Hazard Communication Toolbox Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

It is estimated that one in four workers come in contact with hazardous chemicals or substances at work. Often, the chemicals are no more dangerous than those typically used at home. But workplace exposure, thus the danger, may be greater, due to higher concentrations or more prolonged time of exposure.

An OSHA standard, known as Hazard Communication, exists to help control chemical exposure on the job and is also called "Hazcom" or "Right-to-Know." It is found in OSHA 29CFR 1910.1200.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Over 30 million American workers are exposed to hazardous chemicals in their workplaces. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) is intended to ensure that these workers and their employers are informed of the identities of these hazardous chemicals, associated health and safety hazards, and appropriate protective measures. The HCS covers some 650,000 hazardous chemical products found in over three million establishments.

CHEMICAL HAZARDS

Hazardous chemical products and ingredients are found in many items within the workplace including detergents, solvents, degreasers, odour control products, scale removers and surface cleaners. Some of these products and brands may seem so familiar that they can create a false sense of security about their safety. However, it is important that ALL products containing chemicals are identified and assessed for any chemical hazards.

PHYSICAL HAZARDS

- Explosive
- Flammable gases
- Aerosols
- Oxidizing gases
- Flammable liquids
- Flammable solids
- Self-reactive substances & mixtures
- Pyrophoric liquids
- Pyrophoric solids
- Self-heating substances & mixtures
- Substances/Mixtures emitting flammable gases
- Oxidizing liquids
- Oxidizing solids
- Organic peroxides
- Corrosive to metals

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

- Hazardous to the aquatic environment (acute and chronic).
- Hazardous to the ozone layer.

Criteria for classifying chemicals have been developed for the following health hazard classes:

- Acute toxicity
- Skin corrosion/irritation
- Serious eye damage/eye irritation
- Respiratory or skin sensitization
- Germ cell mutagenicity
- Carcinogenicity
- Reproductive toxicity
- Specific target organ toxicity – single exposure
- Specific target organ toxicity – repeated exposure
- Aspiration hazard

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

1. **THE HAZCOM PROGRAM**

Your company should have a complete and comprehensive HAZCOM

program. The program should be in writing and should include: a determination of the hazards present in your company, labeling of all chemical containers, training about the hazardous chemicals, an inventory of all of the hazardous chemicals, and safety data sheets. The program should also cover tasks that involve chemicals, but that are not routine.

2. **INFORMING EMPLOYEES**

The employer must inform its employees of the hazards of the chemicals they use. This is done by training new employees or whenever new chemicals are brought in for use. Training should be repeated periodically. Other ways of informing employees about hazards include safety data sheets and labeling of containers that hold chemicals.

3. **Safety Data Sheet (SDS)**

Safety Data Sheets contain in-depth information on hazardous chemical ingredients and their potential health effects including toxicological properties, physical hazards, safe use, storage, handling, disposal requirements and emergency procedures.

These documents must be made available by the manufacturer, importer or distributor of hazardous chemical products and made available to any person who is likely to be affected by the chemical, and to anyone who asks for the details. WHS Officers and Business owners must then make sure that the documents are available to all workers who come into contact with the substance.

The SDS is normally product related and not specific to workplace; nevertheless, the information on an SDS enables the employer to:

1. Develop an active program of worker protection measures, including training, which is specific to the workplace.
2. Consider measures necessary to protect the environment.

SDS also provides important source of information for other target audience in the GHS – so certain elements may be used for the transport of dangerous goods, emergency responders (including poison centers), and those involved in the professional use of

pesticides and consumers.

An SDS should be produced for substances and mixtures which meet the harmonized criteria for physical, health, or environmental hazards under the GHS and for all mixtures which contain ingredients that meet the criteria for carcinogenic, toxic to reproduction or specific target organ toxicity in concentrations exceeding the cut-off limits for SDS specified by the criteria for mixtures.

PREVENTION

Companies that have dangerous chemicals stored and/or used on site also need to create a Written Hazard Communication Program. This program needs to be customized to the specific facility and should include information such as:

- **Chemicals**– Identify which chemicals are used in the facility. This would include any chemicals that are present at any time, even if they aren't always being used.
- **Safety Data Sheets**– The program has to have safety data sheets (SDS) on each of the chemicals listed.
- **Warnings**– Warning information about all of the chemicals so that employees can quickly see what risks are associated with exposure.
- **Response Plans**– Instructions on what should be done in the event of exposure or an accident. This would include details on what to do for anything ranging from basic skin exposure to a full chemical spill or any other possible situation.

FINAL WORD

Your company should be mandated to have a written Hazard Communication Program (HAZCOM) to inform employees about how to use chemicals safely.

Understanding how to read and understand Safety Data Sheets is critical.