HazCom Employer's Guide Step 1: Learn the Standards

What You NEED To Do

As an employer, you are required by law to comply with the following HazCom standards: Hazard Communication, Subpart Z standards, the OSHA Process Safety Management (PSM) standard. You can have a working HazCom policy and procedure, without an incident, and not be compliant and risk fines and civil litigation. Download a model HazCom policy that is compliant and can be quickly edited to use in your workplace; however, it is also critical that you audit your policies & procedures every year, or as needed, to accommodate changes in legislation.

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A Definition of Hazard Communication

The starting point for compliance is recognizing the 3 principal sources of OSHA chemical safety requirements:

1. The Hazard Communication standard, or HazCom, establishes general safety requirements to ensure that workers exposed to hazardous chemicals are aware of the dangers and how to protect themselves from them;
2. Subpart Z standards covering specific hazardous substances including asbestos, carcinogens, vinyl chloride, cadmium, lead, benzene, ethylene dioxide, etc.; and
3. The OSHA Process Safety Management (PSM) standard requires employers that manufacture or use highly hazardous chemicals to implement special programs to prevent and respond to incidents involving those chemicals.

When employees work with chemicals, they face a number of health hazards, including irritation, and physical hazards, such as flammability and corrosion. The United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) stipulates that chemical manufacturers and importers must evaluate the hazards of the

chemicals with which they deal and pass along that information through labels and safety data sheets. Similarly, any employer with hazardous chemicals in the workplace must design and institute a written hazard communication program, which includes labeling all containers, giving all employees access to safety data sheets, and conducting a training program for all employees who could be exposed to the hazards. OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) specifies how to communicate information about the hazards and how to take protective measures.

The HCS ensures employees have the right to know the chemicals to which they are exposed in the workplace and their hazards. Employees not only must have access to the information, but they also must participate in employers' training programs and know how to actively and effectively protect themselves. The Hazard Communication Standard also informs employers about designing and implementing these effective protective programs for employees who could be exposed to hazardous chemicals. OSHA's overall goal is to reduce the number of chemical source illnesses and injuries in workplaces across the nation.

The standard that gave workers the right to know, now gives them the right to understand.

The Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) is now aligned with the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS). This update to the Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) will provide a common and coherent approach to classifying chemicals and communicating hazard information on labels and safety data sheets. This update will also help reduce trade barriers and result in productivity improvements for American businesses that regularly handle, store, and use hazardous chemicals while providing cost savings for American businesses that periodically update safety data sheets and labels for chemicals covered under the hazard communication standard.

Hazard Communication Standard

In order to ensure chemical safety in the workplace, information about the identities and hazards of the chemicals must be

available and understandable to workers. OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) requires the development and dissemination of such information:

- Chemical manufacturers and importers are required to evaluate the hazards of the chemicals they produce or import, and prepare labels and safety data sheets to convey the hazard information to their downstream customers.
- All employers with hazardous chemicals in their workplaces must have labels and safety data sheets for their exposed workers, and train them to handle the chemicals appropriately.

Major changes to the Hazard Communication Standard

- **Hazard classification**: Provides specific criteria for classification of health and physical hazards, as well as classification of mixtures.
- **Labels**: Chemical manufacturers and importers will be required to provide a label that includes a harmonized signal word, pictogram, and hazard statement for each hazard class and category. Precautionary statements must also be provided.
- **Safety Data Sheets:** Will now have a specified 16-section format.
- **Information and training:** Employers are required to train workers on the new labels elements and safety data sheets format to facilitate recognition and understanding.

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