Safety Spotlight:

Hazard Communication

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), developed the Hazard Communication Standard to help protect employees from the dangers of hazardous chemicals. Commonly known as HazCom, or the “Right to Know” law. This regulation gives employees:

* The right to know which chemicals are being used in the workplace
* The possible dangers that employees could be exposed to
* How to protect employees when using hazardous chemicals

A hazardous chemical is any chemical which is classified as a physical hazard or a health hazard, such as: simple asphyxiant, combustible dust, pyrophoric (“instantly igniting”) gas, or any other hazard not otherwise classified in the group.

* Physical hazard - Chemicals that can cause a fire, explosion, or some other violent reaction when they come in contact with air, water, or other chemicals.
* Health hazard - Chemicals that are harmful to people’s health ~~are called health hazards~~. by entering the body in one of three ways - inhalation, skin contact, or ingestion. These chemicals can cause short-term (acute) health problems or long-term (chronic) health problems.

OSHA considers any chemical to be a health hazard that ~~which~~:

* Is toxic;
* Is corrosive to the skin or eyes;
* Is a respiratory sensitizer;
* May cause cancer, birth defects, or reproductive issues;
* Attacks specific organs in the body; or
* Is harmful or deadly when inhaled.

The HazCom Standard mandates the employer comply with five regulatory requirements:

* + Identify and create an inventory of all hazardous chemicals at the workplace.
  + Ensure each chemical has a GHS-style safety data sheet, or SDS, that is easily accessible to all employees who work with that chemical.
  + Ensure each chemical container is properly labeled with a GHS-style label or an OSHA-~~approved~~ acceptable workplace label.
  + Create and implement an employee HazCom training program.
  + Develop a written HazCom program that describes how the HazCom program will be implemented and how the employer will comply with the HazCom Standard.

Hazard Communication begins at the chemical manufacturing plant. Chemists classify and categorize each chemical based on its hazards. From this information the chemical’s GHS-style safety data sheet and label are created.

Chemical Inventory: When a chemical arrives at the workplace, the hazard information is passed along so it can be added to the organization’s chemical inventory.

OSHA requires that each company keep a complete and up-to-date inventory of all its hazardous chemicals, both on-site and off-site.

* The safety data sheet explains what you need to know to safely work with a chemical. To be compliant with GHS, all safety data sheets must have the GHS-specified 16 section format and include certain types of information in each section. This standard format helps ensure that all employers and employees understand the chemical, its hazards, and the precautions the user must take to stay safe.
* Per OSHA, safety data sheets must readily accessible to you, in your work area, during each work shift.
* The safety data sheet is not the only source of information. Each hazardous chemical must be labeled with the chemical name and other vital, quick-reference information. The label is not intended to be the sole source of safety and hazard information, but rather serves as an immediate warning to the user.
* The HazCom Standard requires that there be six label elements: Product identifier or ingredient disclosure; Signal word; Hazard statement; Pictograms; Precautionary statement; and Supplier identification.
  + Of these six elements, 4 are “harmonized” in the GHS system based upon the chemical’s hazard class and category – the signal word, hazard statement(s), pictogram, and precautionary statement(s).
* Pictograms are always a black symbol shown on a white background and surrounded by a red, diamond-shaped border. These images are used to depict the physical, health, or environmental hazards caused by a particular chemical. They are meant to be an immediate, graphic warning.
  + The information on the label must be linked back to the safety data sheet and chemical inventory.
* The chemical inventory, safety data sheets, and labels are critical when it comes to working safely with hazardous chemicals, but what brings it all together is the training and information your company is required to provide to you.
* The HazCom Standard requires that each person who works with hazardous chemicals be trained on:
  + HazCom Standard requirements;
  + Places where hazardous chemicals are located in your workplace;
  + Location and availability of the chemical inventory, safety data sheets, ~~and~~ written HazCom program, and how to read GHS-style safety data sheets and labels; and
  + The in-house labeling system your company uses, if applicable
* The purpose of the written HazCom program is to document, in detail, the employer’s plans for communicating the hazards involved with using the chemicals in the workplace.
  + Employees have the right to review the written HazCom program whenever they choose to, so that they can see what employer is doing to keep workers knowledgeable and safe.

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