

RETAIL

Safety education provided by the insurance specialists at
Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd



TARGET
ON
SAFETY

Understanding the Hazards in the Workplace

Introduction

Did you know that several of the materials and chemicals you encounter in the workplace every day are potentially hazardous for your health and safety? However, just because we handle hazardous materials does not mean we cannot also maintain a safe working environment for everyone. **If we all are aware of the chemical hazards in our workplace and understand the necessary safety precautions, we can avoid illness and injury on-the-job.**

Hazard Communication is designed to do just as the name suggests: communicate hazard information to each employee. You need to know what chemicals you are working with or exposed to, hazards associated with each chemical and how to protect yourself. This education is accomplished through a variety of means, so we want to review our programme with you today.

Hazardous Material Defined

Hazardous material is defined as items that have a physical or health hazard associated with them. For instance, flammable, combustible or explosive materials are physically hazardous. In the same sense, materials that are carcinogenic, toxic, corrosive and/or irritating are considered health hazards. This definition captures many of the materials found in our workplace, including cleaning supplies, adhesives, oils, degreasers, paints and more.

Hazard Determination

You may wonder who determines what is “hazardous” or not. The process of hazard determination is scientific and guided by government and EU requirements. The manufacturer of the hazardous material has the most information about their products and is required to provide this information to users of that material, like us. There are severe penalties for chemical manufacturers who do not provide complete or accurate information through their safety data sheets (SDS).

The Chemical Inventory

We maintain a listing (inventory) of all the materials that have physical or health hazards at our facility. This helps to ensure that we have all the necessary SDS. Our employees are an important factor in keeping the inventory current. Any time a new material is brought into our workplace, we need to make sure it is added to the chemical inventory if it has a physical or health hazard. **If you bring a new material into your area, please make sure your supervisor knows about it so the chemical inventory can be updated.**



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Safety Data Sheets: The Most Important Documents

SDS are the most important documents we have concerning the chemicals used at our company. These are the documents the chemical manufacturer prepares to inform the end-users (you and me) about any hazards associated with a product. SDS are required to summarise certain information, including product identification, scientific information about ingredients, hazards associated with the product, incompatibilities, potential reactions, safe handling and storage, and spills guidelines.

The most important sections focus on first aid requirements and personal protective equipment. **If you have never read an SDS, then that's something you need to do when you and your supervisor review the specific hazardous materials you may encounter in the course of your job duties.**

Your supervisor will show you where all the SDS are located and will help you navigate through them. **It is important for you to familiarise yourself with the SDS for any hazardous material you work with or may be exposed to in the workplace, so that you can understand the risks and take precautions.** In addition, you should understand the SDS so you know how to find information quickly when you need it, such as in the event of a spill or accident.

Labelling Requirements

Our first line of defence with any type of material is the label found on the product container. It is critically important that every container be labelled so it properly identifies the material inside. At the very least, the label must identify the product and any related hazards, such as it being corrosive, flammable or an irritant. Further information identifying appropriate personal protective equipment is useful as well.

Generally, there is not a concern about the primary container being appropriately labelled. Manufacturers will make sure the primary container is labelled properly, and there is never a reason to remove a label from a primary container. **However, we need to always make sure secondary containers are also labelled.** For instance, if we pour some window cleaner from the primary container into a pistol-grip sprayer, we need to label the pistol-grip sprayer (the secondary container) with all the right information. Simply labelling the bottle as "cleaner" is not sufficient; more detail is necessary. Your supervisor will help you with any labelling requirements.

Summary

Let's all remember that the chemicals we work with have a potential for danger. Most materials you encounter are generally safe, but it's important to know the possible hazards of any substance in order to maintain a safe workplace. Our hazard communication programme is designed to keep you up to date on all the hazardous materials we have in the facility, and how to use those materials safely.

When you have questions regarding materials, make sure you ask them before using the material. Never make assumptions about any chemical you are using and always remain properly and fully informed about the material. **In order for our hazard communication programme to be effective, you need to take responsibility for using the information provided in order to keep yourself and co-workers safe.**

