



Loss Control TIPS

Technical Information Paper Series

Innovative Safety and Health SolutionsSM

Hazard Communication

The purpose of OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard is straightforward: to ensure that information about the hazards of chemicals are provided to those who use them. On the surface, this is a noble and practical objective that all of us in the safety and health community can embrace. But as someone once said, "the devil is in the details." Consequently, this regulation, like others, has its quirks and can therefore seem difficult or complicated. However, if you keep the original purpose in mind, practical application can be simplified.

General Requirements

The Hazard Communication standard requires importers and manufacturers to assess the hazards of chemicals they produce or import, and to provide that information to employers who use those chemicals. The information is provided in a Material Safety Data Sheet, or MSDS. The employers, in turn, must convey this information to their employees by way of a formal Hazard Communication Program.

In simple terms, a formal Hazard Communication program consists of ensuring that:

- a. an individual is assigned to oversee the Hazard Communication program
- b. a listing of all hazardous chemicals used and potentially encountered, and their locations, is available to employees
- c. copies of the MSDSs are maintained in a readily accessible place for use by employees
- d. labels on incoming chemicals are not removed or defaced
- e. containers are labeled with the contents and appropriate hazard warnings
- f. employees are provided information and training, about the Hazard Communication program and about the chemicals they are using.

Specific Requirements

Employers are required to develop, implement, and maintain a written Hazard Communication program. An individual must be assigned responsibility for the initial and ongoing activities that are to be undertaken to comply with the standard. The written program must describe how labeling, MSDSs, and training requirements will be met. The program should describe how hazard communication information will be provided to contractors and others who may be working on the employer's site.

Employees' training should cover the elements of the Hazard Communication program itself. For example, employers must provide information about where MSDSs are kept, what kind of information is on them, how to read them, and an explanation of the labeling system used in the organization.

Additionally, specific training should cover the actual chemicals with which the employees work. The training should provide details on how to detect the presence or release of hazardous chemicals in the workplace, the health hazards associated with those chemicals, and the measures employees could take to protect themselves.

All containers must be clearly labeled as to the contents. Portable containers which are intended for immediate use by employees do not require labeling. Appropriate hazard warnings must be clearly marked on the containers. The manufacturer's name and address should be on all containers. Labels on incoming chemicals must not be removed or defaced.

Records of the MSDSs and records of training must be maintained for thirty years. Training documentation must include names of employees, content of training, and date(s) of training.

Some Quirks

Laboratory employees have specific responsibilities under the Hazard Communication regulation. Specifically, the regulation considers them to be manufacturers; therefore, they must ensure that chemicals shipped from the laboratory have proper labels, and that MSDSs are provided.

Hazard Communication labeling *does not apply* to all materials in the workplace. Exemptions include pesticides, food additives, drugs, cosmetics, distilled spirits, hazardous wastes, tobacco, wood or wood products and any consumer product; these are regulated by other government agencies. Some *manufactured articles* are included, such as welding rods, grinding wheels, and items that under normal conditions of use release hazardous amounts of chemicals into the air.

Employers are not required to evaluate chemical hazards unless they choose *not to rely* on the MSDS supplied to them.

Manufacturers and importers *may withhold the specific chemical identity or chemical name of a hazardous ingredient* provided that they can support the claim that the information was withheld as a "trade secret." However, the information must be made available to health professionals such as a physician, industrial hygienist, etc., who will follow a specified procedure involving confidentiality agreements.

Summary

In spite of these and other unique details of the Hazard Communication Standard, time has proven it to be a useful and practical tool in the prevention and minimization of workplace health hazards. It is important to read the standard in its entirety in order to understand its application to your operation. This article has touched upon the basics of the standard and pointed out some of the unique details. The following check lists should assist you in your effort to evaluate the features of your program.

For more information, contact your local Hartford agent or your Hartford Loss Control Consultant. Visit The Hartford's Loss Control web site at <http://www.thehartford.com/corporate/losscontrol/>

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Appendix:

Hazard Communication Standard Checklist

Administration

- Do you have a copy of OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard? (29 CFR 1910.1200)
- Is there a written Hazard Communication program which describes how the OSHA standard will be implemented at your facility?
- Has a person been assigned responsibility for both the initial and ongoing activities that have to be undertaken to comply with the Hazard Communication Standard?
- Have employees been informed about the required training? Are employees aware of the specific information and training requirements of the Hazard Communication Standard? (*refer to the Hazard Communication Training Checklist which follows*)
- Is there a list of the hazardous chemicals in each work area, or at a central location?
- Is there a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for each hazardous chemical used?
- Have all containers of hazardous materials been properly labeled?
- Do you have a system to ensure that new employees are trained in Hazard Communication, *before* they begin to work?
- Is there a process in place to inform employees of the hazards of non-routine tasks?
- Do you have a system to identify new hazardous chemicals *before* they are introduced into a work area?
- Do you have a system for informing employees when you learn of new hazards associated with a chemical you use?
- Do you have a records retention system that will retain the MSDSs (or the alternative record) for a minimum of thirty years?
- Do you have a training log to record Hazard Communication training?
- Have you established a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the program?

Training

- Have employees been informed that there are hazardous chemicals present in their work place?
- Do employees know the location of the Hazard Communication program?
- Do employees know where the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) are located?
- Do employees know where the list of hazardous chemicals is located?
- Do employees understand how to detect the presence or release of hazardous chemicals in the workplace?
- Have employees been trained on the physical and health hazards of the chemicals in their work area?
- Are employees trained about proper work practices and personal protective equipment in relation to the hazardous chemicals in their work areas?
- Have employees been trained on the specifics of the MSDS sheets, and how to use them?
- Do employees understand the labeling system and what the different hazard warnings mean?