

Information Bulletin

NUMBER 47

Hazard Communication

One of the most frequently cited OSHA standards for both construction and general industry remains the Hazard Communication Standard, also referred to as the "Right to Know". This standard is addressed in 29 CFR 1910.1200 and 29 CFR 1926.59.

The standard was developed to require employers to notify employees of the hazards of chemicals they use during the scope of employment, and outlines procedures to be followed. Employees can then take appropriate precautions to help avoid injury and illnesses that can result from exposure to workplace chemicals.

To assist with the development and implementation of a Hazard Communication Policy in your workplace, the following actions can be taken:

- Assign a designated employee to obtain a copy of 29CFR1910.1200, and become familiar with its contents
- Complete an assessment of your workplace and develop a list of all chemicals used.
- Document the quantity used and the employees who are exposed to these chemicals and raw materials
- Obtain Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for the applicable items, and update them as new products are introduced to the workplace

The following items are needed to help assist with compliance to this standard:

- A written Hazard Communication Policy
- Obtaining and maintaining MSDS
- Documented employee training for personal protection, spill or leak containment and control
- Container labeling procedures

This bulletin is intended only as a reminder and is offered solely as a guide to assist management in its responsibility of providing a safer working environment. This bulletin is not intended to cover all possible hazardous conditions or unsafe acts that may exist. Other unsafe acts or hazardous conditions should also be noted and corrective action taken.

Part of the OSHA standard that should not be overlooked is the requirement for a written Hazard Communication Policy. This policy should address and document the procedures that will be taken in your workplace. Items to include in the written policy should include the following:

- A list of chemicals used in the workplace.
- The position of the person designated to obtain and maintain the MSDS information
- The accessible location or locations where Material Safety Data Sheets will be maintained
- Container labeling procedures, including assignment of responsibility for this activity
- The procedures to be followed for documented employee training, and the assignment of responsibility
- Procedures that will be followed for informing contractors of chemical exposure in the workplace

As with any safety program, your written Hazard Communication policy should be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis to confirm that procedures are being followed and that the policy is indeed effective. Updates and adjustments to both the written procedures and the implementation should be made as needed, so that employees are well trained and can take the necessary precautions when working with chemicals.

The development and effective implementation of a written Hazard Communication Policy can help your company reduce the potential for workplace injuries and illnesses, in addition to avoiding a potential OSHA citation and fine, as this standard remains among the top ten most frequently cited during OSHA inspections.