



Fast Facts

Workers' Right to Know:

What you should know about workplace chemicals

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Hazard Communication (HAZCOM) Standard, 29 CFR §1910.1200, is a “performance standard.” That means the standard does not prescribe each step of a program. It gives the expected results rather than how to get there. For example, training records are not required. If you are an employee in a workplace where hazardous chemicals are present, you must be able to describe the hazards of the chemical products¹ in the workplace and know what measures are used to avoid those hazards that can cause injury to yourself or others.

If your workplace has hazardous chemicals present, HAZCOM requires that your employer train you (1) when you're initially assigned, and (2) whenever a new or different product is introduced into the workplace which represents a new hazard.

This training must be effective and must enable you to understand the hazards in the workplace without having to look at the safety data sheets (SDS). The ability to understand SDSs is important when additional information is needed; therefore, you must be able to find and understand how to read them. Your knowledge, not the SDS, is your first line of defense against chemical hazards.

You must be informed of ...

- the requirements of the HAZCOM Standard;
- any operations in the work area where hazardous chemicals are present; and
- the location and availability of the written HAZCOM program, including the comprehensive list of hazardous chemicals and SDSs.

You must be trained to know...

- the methods and observations used to detect the presence or release of a hazardous chemical in the work area;
- the physical and health hazards of all hazardous chemicals in the work area;
- the measures used to prevent or protect against hazards, including specific procedures implemented to protect employees from exposure to hazardous chemicals; and
- the details of the HAZCOM Program, including how materials must be labeled, where to find SDSs and the inventory of chemicals, and how to obtain and use the information.

A good way to make sure you have been effectively trained is to review the hazardous chemicals used in your work area and ask yourself:

- Do I understand what the hazards are and how to protect myself? Can I find the SDSs for these materials? Can I explain what the SDSs mean? Do I understand the physical and health hazards associated with using these hazardous chemicals?
- If you cannot discuss the hazards and controls, or cannot understand what the information is on the SDS, the training has not been effective.

¹ Hazardous chemicals include pure products (for example – perchloroethylene in a degreaser) and mixtures containing multiple hazardous chemicals. Hazardous chemicals can be a health hazard 1910.1200 (Appendix A - Health Hazard Criteria) or a physical hazard (Appendix B - Physical Hazard Criteria). Both appendices are mandated by the OSHA Hazard Communication Standard.

Checklist for Effective HAZCOM Training

Each employee in a workplace covered by HAZCOM should be able to answer the following questions. If you can answer these questions with confidence concerning the hazardous chemicals that employees currently use, then the HAZCOM training can be considered effective. If not, the training course and methods may need to be modified and the training repeated.

- Where is my employer's written Hazard Communication Program?
- Where is the current and comprehensive list (inventory) of hazardous chemicals present in the workplace?
- Where is a copy of 29 CFR §1910.1200, the OSHA Hazard Communication standard?
- Where are the SDSs for the chemicals present in my workplace?
- How will my employer inform about health and chemical hazards and what are the protective measures associated with non-routine work tasks?
- Where are the labels I will use to identify containers (cans, bottles, cups, etc.) after I have transferred hazardous chemicals into them?
- Do the labels have the pictograms that are required under the updated standard?
- If bulk tanks of hazardous chemicals are present in my workplace, how do I identify their contents and hazards?
- If employees of other employers (contractors, for example) use hazardous chemicals in my workplace, where can I find the MSDSs for these chemicals?
- Which chemicals that I work with pose eye hazards, skin hazards, and/or inhalation hazards?
 - How can I detect the presence or a release of these chemicals?
 - What work practices, emergency procedures, and/or personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from these hazards?
- Which chemicals that I work with are flammable, explosive, and/or reactive?
 - How can I detect the presence or a release of these chemicals?
 - What work practices, emergency procedures, and/or personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from exposure to these hazards?
- Which chemicals that I work with are known or suspected to cause cancer in humans?
 - How can I detect the presence or a release of these chemicals?
 - What work practices, emergency procedures, and/or personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from exposure to these hazards?
- Which chemicals that I work with have additional requirements in OSHA substance-specific standards?
 - How can I detect a release of these chemicals?
 - What work practices, emergency procedures, and personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from exposure to these hazards?

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Relevant OSHA Standards

- 29 CFR §1910.1200, Hazard Communication
- 29 CFR §1910.1450, Occupational Exposure to Chemicals in Laboratories
- 29 CFR §1910, Subpart Z, Toxic and Hazardous Substances
- 29 CFR § 1926.59 Hazard Communication
- 29 CFR 1926, Subpart Z and Hazardous Substances

For More Information

- Safe Use and Handling of Hazardous Chemical Products, <http://www.compliance.gov>
- Hazard Communication – Common Traps and Helpful Hints in Tools, <http://www.compliance.gov>
- Asbestos: Do Not Disturb, <http://www.compliance.gov>



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