



Hazard Communication: Your Right-To-Know

Chemicals are necessary to perform many jobs. However, if they are not handled properly, they can present a hazard to your health and safety. The Hazard Communication Standard (HAZCOM) has been developed by OSHA to inform employees of workplace chemical hazards. Under the HAZCOM rule, you have the right to know about the hazards in your workplace and how to protect yourself against them.

HAZCOM was developed so that everyone who works around hazardous chemicals understands the chemicals' specific hazards and has the information, knowledge, and equipment to prevent safety and health problems.

HAZCOM requires employers to develop a written hazard communication program that informs employees:

- About the HAZCOM rule and how it's used in the workplace.
- How to recognize, understand, and use labels and material safety data sheets (MSDS's)
- About safety procedures to follow when working with hazardous materials

What you need to know

The written hazard communication program provides you with critical safety information. Specifically, it tells you:

- Who's in charge of your company/facility hazard communication.
- What hazardous chemicals are stored or used at your facility.
- How you will be informed about workplace hazards.
- Proper training to identify and reduce chemical hazards
- Accurate and complete MSDS's and chemical labels

Outside vendors, such as contractors, will also be informed about the chemical hazards they may face in the workplace.

Chemical labels and the MSDS: Know what you're dealing with

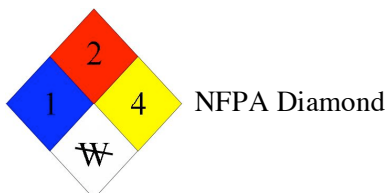
Labels and MSDS's provide important safety information. Protect yourself by taking time to carefully read chemical labels and MSDS's before you move, handle, or open a chemical container.

Labels and MSDS's should always tell you:

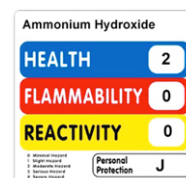
- The common and/or chemical name, including any chemical ingredients.
- The name and address of its manufacturer or importer
- Its potential health and physical hazards (for example, some chemicals can damage the eyes or skin, causing burns, rashes, vision problems, etc.).
- Protective clothing, equipment, and procedures needed to safely use the chemical
- Proper storage and handling such as "keep away from open flames".

Colors, bars, and diamonds

Information on labels can be shown using words, colors, numbers, pictures, symbols, or any combination of these. The most common labeling systems use color-coded bars or diamonds to indicate the type of hazard. Colored areas on bars and diamonds indicate the kind of hazard.



NFPA Diamond



HMIS Color Bar

For example:

- Red** = fire hazard
- Yellow** = instability hazard (on diamonds)
- Blue** = health hazards

The white area of the labels contains information regarding the specific chemical. For example, the health hazard the chemical may cause, what part of the body may be affected by the chemical, or what protective equipment should be worn when handling the chemical.

Numbers

Numbers in the color-coded sections classify the degree of hazard. For example:

- 0** = No hazard
- 1** = Slight
- 2** = Moderate
- 3** = Serious
- 4** = Severe

Reading the MSDS

MSDS's provide more detailed information on a particular chemical. Although there is no one MSDS format, you'll find specific information about each chemical, such as:

-Ingredients

-**Hazard identification** – key hazards to be aware of, including health hazards

-**First-aid measures**

-**Firefighting measures**

-**Accidental release measures** – what to do in case of a spill, leak or release into the air.

-**Safe handling and storage**

-**Exposure controls and personal protection** – guidelines to avoid exposure to hazards.

-**Physical and chemical properties** – identifies properties that could affect how hazardous the chemical is in a given situation.

-**Stability and reactivity** – what could happen if the chemical is combined with air, water, or other chemicals.

-**Toxicological information** – how the substance was tested for health hazards

-**Ecological information** – what happens if the chemical is release into the environment.

-**Disposal considerations**

-**Transport information**

-**Regulatory information** – regulations that apply to the chemicals issued by OSHA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), etc.

Labels and MSDS's: Quick reminders

Never use a chemical that does not have a label affixed to the container. If a chemical container is without a label or it's difficult to read, notify your supervisor immediately. By doing this, you help keep yourself and co-workers safe from potential danger.

Some important reminders:

- Read MSDS and container labels carefully prior to handling a chemical
- Be sure you know exactly what chemicals you are dealing with
- Never use a chemical that is not labeled properly
- Follow guidelines on labels and MSDS's
- Use protective clothing and equipment to decrease exposure to hazards
- Use only approved containers; do not use water bottles or other containers
- Ask your supervisor questions if you are unsure how to work with any chemical