

Hazard Communication: Understanding the Hazards Around You

Your commitment to safety involves knowing about the chemicals you work with, work around, and how to protect yourself. OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard, also referred to as The Right To Know And Understand, has three important parts: Chemical Labeling, Safety Data Sheets (SDSs), and Training.

- **Chemical labeling** is your first line of defense in your right to know because they provide the chemical name and some of the hazards. The label does not have all of the information needed, but it is a great starting point.
- **Safety Data Sheets (SDSs)** are developed by the manufacturer to provide information such as procedures on safe handling, specific health hazards, how to store the product, personal protective equipment (PPE) needed, and what to do in an emergency. SDSs can seem overwhelming because they have more technical information about the product than a label, but they are really important tools for you to use both at work and home.
- **Training** focuses on the details of how to read labels and SDSs, understand hazards, find your department's SDSs, and answer any questions you may have about working with chemicals.



Below are some tips on how to set yourself up for safety while handling chemicals:

- **Keep safety in mind:** Know where your department's SDSs are kept and if you are unsure, ask your supervisor.
- **Preparation is key:** Before working with a new product, review its SDS, particularly sections on exposure routes and PPE because it may require specific training.
- **Avoid shortcuts:** If this is the first time you are working with a chemical, don't assume you know what to do. Take the time to learn how to protect yourself and the people around you by reading the labels and SDS.
- **Do your part:** Complete *Hazard Communications: Right to Understand Training* at myHR.northwestern.edu by March 10, 2017.



Wally Stevenson, Plumber,
reviewing an SDS

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant to your work. With your team, review an SDS commonly used in your department and discuss each section and how it applies to your work.
- **Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.
- **Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Safety at Home

Safety doesn't work in shifts. It should always be on our minds even when at home. To protect you and your family, consider these safety tips:

- Place cleaning products on a higher shelf to prevent easy access for children.
- Materials with strong fumes should only be used in well-ventilated spaces with open windows or fans.
- Do not store flammable or combustible products, such as bleach, near the furnace or water heater.
- When transferring a chemical to a different container, remember to label the new container with its name and hazards to prevent mishandling.
- **Did you know?** Even common household products, such as Pine-Sol or Windex, have SDSs which can be accessed online.



For Additional Information

Please contact [Gwen Butler](mailto:Gwen.Butler@northwestern.edu), Director of Environmental Health and Safety, at 847.491.4936 with any questions. Risk Management Services can be reached at 847.491.5610 or risk@northwestern.edu