Don’t Guess At Hazards

WHAT’S AT STAKE

We encounter many potentially dangerous substances at work.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Hazardous substances can be corrosive, explosive, toxic, radioactive, reactive, flammable or a combination of these.

EXAMPLE
In the warehouse at his workplace, Steve came across a container without a label. He thought he knew what was in the container, and prepared to use it. However, it was a highly flammable chemical, and a tiny static spark from the tool which opened the can ignited vapors and caused a deadly explosion.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Find out what hazards are present, or may occur. Once a hazard has been identified and communicated to those affected, proper safety procedures can be put into place.

Although hazard communication systems may differ from jobsite to jobsite, some elements should be constant:

1. Detailed Labeling: All potentially hazardous materials should be labeled as to contents, product name and manufacturer, possible hazards of use, safe handling information (required PPE, mixing, application, storage) and first aid measures.

Bring any unlabeled container to the attention of your supervisor. Don’t use it.

In order for labels to be effective safety measures, all workers need to learn how to use and interpret them. Don’t guess!

2. Safety data sheets are the second line of defense against workplace incidents involving hazardous substances. These information sheets should be available for chemical substances found in the workplace, particularly substances known to be dangerous. They are provided by the supplier of the substance.

The SDS contains information similar to the label but in more detail. It should say what to do in the event of a spill, what first aid is necessary, health effects, chemical properties, and it should list emergency contact numbers.

Read through the SDS until you are sure you understand all instructions and precautions. The SDS should always be available on the jobsite during all work hours, including nightshifts. If you do not understand the SDS, ask your supervisor for help. SDS files should be kept up to date.

3. Worker Education: All these precautions would be useless without the active participation of those most affected: you, the worker. A big part of any hazard communication system is education and training.

FINAL WORD

Get the information you need to work safely around hazardous chemicals. Learn how to protect yourself and others from exposure, spills and other incidents.