WHMIS Safety Data Sheets



Safety Talk

Most of us don’t give a second thought to the paperwork that comes with a new product, even a hazardous one. But an SDS, or Safety Data Sheet, may just save your life. It includes detailed information on how to handle, store or dispose of hazardous materials. More detailed than a label, an SDS identifies a product’s ingredients, tells you how to respond in an emergency, and how to deal with unintended exposure. It’s definitely an excellent source of information when working with new or unfamiliar products. In this Safety Talk, we’ll describe how to use an SDS, discuss the main purpose of an SDS, and clarify what kind of information you will find on one.

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What Can Go Wrong
Opening a box of all-purpose cleaner, Seth pulled out an SDS written in English and French. He gave it a once over then tossed it into the waste bin. He’d forever regret that decision. The chemical burn he received from using the cleaner incorrectly landed him in the burn unit at a local hospital.

Always be familiar with the hazards of a product before you start using it. Doing so certainly would have saved Seth from receiving serious chemical burns.

Start out by matching the name of the product on the container to the SDS. Then read the SDS to understand the hazards, safe handling and storage instructions, and what to do in an emergency.You can think of the SDS as having four main purposes. It tells you:

- The name of the product and supplier
- The hazard type, either physical or health,
- How to work safely with the product, and
- The proper response to an exposure

How to Protect Yourself
An SDS has 16 required sections, which is a lot of information! But you don't have to memorize all 16. You should, however, know what kind of information you'll find on an SDS and what's most useful.

First, Sections 1, 2, 4 through 8, and parts of section 11 are valuable if you need quick information about one of four areas related to a hazardous product:

- Its name
- Its hazards
- How to handle and store it properly n How to respond to an emergency or other problem involving the product

Second, depending on your job, you'll need to read and understand certain sections of an SDS before working with a product. For example, if you handle, store, or dispose of hazardous products, you'll want to review and understand the sections on those activities.

Third, when reading an SDS, you may encounter "Not Applicable" or "Not Available"; these mean different things. "Not Applicable" means the required information isn't relevant to a product. "Not Available" means there's no readily available information for a required section or sub-section.

FINAL WORD
Your employer needs to keep Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) for each hazardous product. The SDSs should be up to date and found in an easily accessible place. Always read a hazardous product's SDS before handling, storing, or disposing of it. Doing so will keep you and others safe when using hazardous materials.