WHMIS: The Lowdown on Labels and Pictograms

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

What do all-purpose cleaner, paint, and fluorescent lights have in common? They all contain hazardous materials.

Hazardous materials are dangerous but it's possible to stay safe through the use of labels and pictograms. These help you classify the type of hazardous material you're working with and the dangers they present.

In this Safety Talk, we'll review labels and pictograms, how to identify the hazards they warn about, and steps you should take when working with hazardous products.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Exposure to chemicals causes, or contributes to, a slew of serious health problems, as well as environmental hazards. While employers must ensure that hazardous products have proper and legible labels, workers also have responsibility in working safely with chemicals.

As a worker, you must:

- Check to see if a label is on a product before you use it.
- Read, understand and follow the instructions on the label.
- Ask your supervisor if you are unsure how to use and store a product.
- Ask your supervisor for a new label if the old one cannot be seen or read properly.
- Never use a product that isn't labelled or which has an unreadable label

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

There are two types of labels and nine types of pictograms, but don't worry—you only need to know where to look for information and know what it means.

The most common type of label is the supplier label. There are worksite labels too, which have less, but similar information to the supplier label. Seven sections must be included on a supplier label:

- A product identifier that identifies the hazardous material being used, including its brand, chemical, generic or common names.The initial supplier identifier is the manufacturer or importer's contact information, including name, address and telephone number.
- A pictogram, which is a hazard symbol inside a red square set on one of its points. We'll have more information on pictograms later in this Safety Talk.
- Two signal words: "Danger" and "Warning." Danger represents a more severe, immediate risk than Warning. n A hazard statement or statements: This describes the hazards present, based on the product's classification. Most of these statements are standardized.
- A precautionary statement or statements: These describe the recommended steps to take to minimize or prevent adverse effects resulting from exposure to a hazardous substance.
- Supplemental label information, which is required under two circumstances: Either the product releases toxic gas when it comes in contact with water, or the mixture is acutely toxic, but the level of toxicity is unknown.

Labels should be large, legible, and located where they can easily be seen on a product. Talk to your supervisor if you encounter damaged or unreadable labels.

Returning to our discussion of pictograms, there are nine pictograms which help identify two categories of potential hazards. Five pictograms identify physical hazards, namely explosive, flammable, oxidizing, compressed gas, and corrosive.

Four pictograms identify dangers to health, including acutely toxic, corrosive, harmful/ irritant and biohazardous.

Once you recognize a pictogram, you'll quickly know if a product is hazardous or not.

FINAL WORD

Using any chemical without knowing the hazards it poses is dangerous and irresponsible, and could result in your injury or death, or that of your co-workers or others. Learn to identify labels and pictograms and ensure you know what you are working with before starting any task.

QUIZ

1. Labels and pictograms help you identify the hazardous materials in a product.
   - True
   - False

2. There are seven types of pictograms that represent health and physical hazards.
   - True
   - False

3. A worksite label has less, but similar information to a:
   a. manufacturer label,
   b. supplier label,
   c. business label,
   d. classification label.

4. The two categories of potential hazards found in pictograms are:
   a. health and welfare,
   b. safety and physical,
   c. physical and health,
   d. health and chemical.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Joanne is working with a new chemical at her job in a plastics factory. What are her safety responsibilities when working with a hazardous material?

BEFORE THE TALK - TIPS

1. Plan to hold a contest where your workers study the nine pictograms for a short time and then see who can memorize and write down the most pictogram categories within one minute. Offer a prize to the winner.
2. Ask your workers if they have ever suffered an injury or close call as a result of using a chemical without first reading about the hazards it poses.
3. This article can help your workers better understand how the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals works: http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/ghs.html

AFTER THE TALK- *CHECKLIST*

PROVIDED FOLLOW-UP TO WORKERS THAT DID

POORLY ON THE QUIZ
NAME: _____
_____
DATE: _____

OBSERVED WORKERS
TASK(S): _____
_____
DATE: _____

REFRESHER TRAINING
TOPIC(S): _____
_____
DATE: _____

OTHER (DESCRIBE): _____
MEETING DATE: _____
LOCATION: _____

NOTES

ATTENDANCE

_____	_____	_____
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INSTRUCTOR: _____ **DATE:** _____

SAFETY TALK: _____