



Material Safety Data Sheet and Safety Labels

In today's world, most tasks require the use of some type of chemical. While many chemicals are classed as "hazardous," we can use these chemicals safely, if we bear in mind that they must be used cautiously. Just because we are familiar with a chemical doesn't mean that we should regard it lightly. Needed precautions must be taken every time we handle that chemical, even if it is for the 100th or 1,000th time.

Our company and the manufacturer of the chemical or chemicals that we use want to help you work safely with these substances. That's why there is now a material safety data sheet, or MSDS, available at your job site for every chemical that you will be exposed to on the job. Familiarize yourself with what it says on the MSDS about every substance that you come into contact with.

The MSDS is there for you. It will tell you about the chemical, what the possible dangers could be, and how to avoid those dangers by handling the substance in a safe manner. If you need to use protective equipment, the sheet will tell you that, too. If there is something on the MSDS you don't understand, ask your supervisor. It won't make you look stupid to ask. It will make you look careful and concerned, which is what you ought to be.

In addition to reading the MSDS before using a chemical, you will also want to read the label on the container. The label will tell you what the chemical is, the manufacturer, the hazards, and how to use it safely. But don't stop with reading the label just once. Read that label every time you handle the can, barrel, drum, or pipe that contains a chemical that you use. At least look at the hazard warning to remind yourself if the chemical is flammable or combustible and what the health hazards might be.

Is the chemical a corrosive that you must keep from contact with your skin? Is it a reproductive hazard or a carcinogen that you will want to be especially careful handling? The label will give you advice on avoiding harm from the product. It might tell you not to breathe the vapors, or to keep the container closed when you aren't using it.

When you look at the label, look for special symbols and signal words that will give you information quickly and easily. If a product is flammable, for instance, a red symbol together with a picture of flames and the word "flammable" will let you know that the chemical will burn. If the chemical is a poison, expect to see the word "poison" and a skull and crossbones.

After the maintenance or repair work is completed, only the same authorized employee who installed the lock may remove and restart the equipment. Before restarting the equipment:

- **CAUTION** - which means be careful; you can be injured, but the injury will not be grave
- **WARNING** - which means the substance can cause a serious injury, even death
- **DANGER** - which means that the substance is a present danger which could cause a serious injury that might be fatal.

Because almost everything we do in the workplace today depends upon the use of some sort of chemical—and because most of us do use chemicals in our work—it is up to us to take the utmost care. We can begin to do that by reading the material safety data sheet for every chemical that we use and by reading the label every time we take out a container. Yes, every time!



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