

Safety Cop



Avoid Chemical Exposures with HazCom Training

Can knowing how to properly handle and store chemicals prevent a disaster? Definitely. Investigators attribute a building explosion in Manhattan's Chelsea section to improper storage of 1,100 gallons of dangerous chemicals and numerous alleged safety violations, including improper transfer of chemicals between containers.

The powerful blast caused no fatalities, but injured 42 people, forced evacuations in the area and disrupted local businesses. Long-term health effects from the chemical exposure are unknown. Your business can avoid this type of accident and liability nightmare by implementing a HazCom training program.

Know Your Chemicals

OSHA rules and other regulations stipulate how to store specific flammable and hazardous materials. Identifying them is the first step. The Hazard Communications Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200), also known as HazCom, when properly followed, ensures that your employees know each chemical's properties and hazards, proper storage and handling, and what to do if the chemical spills, catches fire or is released.

HazCom How-To

HazCom compliance involves four major steps. Generally, all employers with hazardous chemicals in their workplaces must prepare and implement a written hazard communication program, ensure all

containers are properly labeled, provide employees with Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), and conduct training for all affected employees.

MSDS and proper container labeling are the keys to compliance.

1. Perform an inventory of your chemicals, make sure that you have the current MSDS from the manufacturer, make these available to all affected employees, and train them in the HazCom standard (keep permanent records of the training).
2. Ensure that all original and transfer container labels properly identify their contents, and that employees know how to safely decant and transfer, and otherwise use and store chemicals that are not kept in their original containers.

HazCom compliance is indispensable when preparing for an emergency. Should a chemical spill occur, response teams know how to control it safely. They should be trained in proper containment and cleanup methods, based on knowledge of the chemical and its properties, including the use of appropriate personal protection.

Injured employees must receive immediate medical attention. MSDS can help medical personnel determine proper treatment.

Portable or fixed eyewash stations may be appropriate for some businesses; in some cases, emergency showers may be necessary.

