



# fast facts

*advancing safety, health, and workplace rights in the legislative branch*

## ***Workers' Right to Know: What you should know about workplace chemicals***

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Hazard Communication (HAZCOM) Standard, 29 CFR §1910.1200, is a “performance standard.” That means the standard doesn’t prescribe each step of a program. It gives the expected results rather than how to get there. For example, training records aren’t required. If you are an employee in a workplace where hazardous chemicals are present, you must be able to describe the hazards of the chemical products<sup>[1]</sup> in the workplace and what measures are used to avoid those hazards.

If your workplace has chemicals present, HAZCOM requires your employer to train you (1) when you’re initially assigned and (2) whenever a new or different product, which presents a new hazard, is introduced into the workplace.

This training must be effective. To be effective, it must enable you to understand the hazards in the workplace without having to look at the material safety data sheets (MSDSs). The ability to understand MSDSs is important when additional information is needed; therefore, you must be able to find them and understand how to read them. But your knowledge, not the MSDS, is your first line of defense against chemical hazards.

You must be informed of ...

- The requirements of the HAZCOM Standard;
- Any operations in the work area where hazardous chemicals are present; and
- The location and availability of the written HAZCOM program, including the comprehensive list of hazardous chemicals and MSDSs.

You must be trained to know...

- The methods and observations used to detect the presence or release of a hazardous chemical in the work area;
- The physical hazards and health hazards of the chemicals in the work area;
- The measures used to prevent or protect against hazards, including specific procedures implemented to protect employees from exposure to hazardous chemicals; and
- The details of the HAZCOM Program, including how materials must be labeled, where to find MSDSs and the inventory of chemicals, and how to obtain and use the information.

A good way to make sure you have been effectively trained is to review the chemicals used in your area and ask yourself:

- Do I understand what the hazards are and how to protect myself? Can I find the MSDSs for these materials? Can I explain what they mean?
- If you can’t discuss the hazards and controls, or can’t understand what the information is on the MSDS, the training has not been effective.

[1] Hazardous chemicals include pure products (for example – perchloroethylene in a degreaser) and mixtures containing a hazardous chemical that is at least 1% by volume, or 0.5% if the hazardous chemical is a listed carcinogen (for example – spray paint containing more than 1% toluene).

## Checklist for Effective HAZCOM Training

Each employee in a workplace covered by HAZCOM should be able to answer the following questions. If you can answer these questions with confidence concerning the hazardous chemicals that employees currently use, then the HAZCOM training can be considered effective. If not, the training course and methods may need to be modified and the training redone.

- Where is my employer's written Hazard Communication Program?
- Where is the current and comprehensive list (inventory) of hazardous chemicals present in the workplace?
- Where is a copy of 29 CFR §1910.1200, the Hazard Communication standard?
- Where are the MSDSs for the chemicals present in my workplace?
- How will my employer inform me on the subject of the chemical hazards and protective measures associated with non-routine work tasks?
- Where are the labels I will use to identify containers (cans, bottles, cups, etc.) after I have transferred hazardous chemicals into them?
- If bulk tanks of hazardous chemicals are present in my workplace, how do I identify their contents and hazards?
- If employees of other employers (contractors, for example) use hazardous chemicals in my workplace, where can I find the MSDSs for these chemicals?
- Which chemicals that I work with pose eye hazards, skin hazards, and/or inhalation hazards?
  - How can I detect the presence or a release of these chemicals?
  - What work practices, emergency procedures, and/or personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from these hazards?
- Which chemicals that I work with are flammable, explosive, and/or reactive?
  - How can I detect the presence or a release of these chemicals?
  - What work practices, emergency procedures, and/or personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from exposure to these hazards?
- Which chemicals that I work with are known or suspected to cause cancer in humans?
  - How can I detect the presence or a release of these chemicals?
  - What work practices, emergency procedures, and/or personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from exposure to these hazards?
- Which chemicals that I work with have additional requirements in OSHA substance-specific standards?
  - How can I detect a release of these chemicals?
  - What work practices, emergency procedures, and personal protective equipment should I use to protect myself from exposure to these hazards?

## Fast Stats

### Relevant OSHA Standards

29 CFR §1910.1200, Hazard Communication  
29 CFR §1910.1450, Occupational Exposure to Chemicals in Laboratories  
29 CFR §1910, Subpart Z, Toxic and Hazardous Substances

### For More Information

- *Safe Use and Handling of Hazardous Chemical Products Fast Fact* at the OOC website, <http://www.compliance.gov>.
- *Hazard Communication – Common Traps and Helpful Hints in Tools* at the OOC website, <http://www.compliance.gov>.



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