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Four MSDS Precautions to Take

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Getting your MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) act in order isn't just a HazCom/WHMIS obligation. It can quite literally be a matter of life and death to the workers who rely on the completeness and accuracy of the information the MSDS contains. Here are 4 steps you can take to protect your organization and workers.

1. Appoint Central MSDS Administrator

OSHA experts say it's important to designate a point person who's responsible for keeping track of MSDS. This person should:

- Make sure there's a current and complete MSDS for each hazardous substance at your workplace;
- Keep an accurate log of hazardous substances; and
- Ensure that workers have ready access to MSDS.

2. Keep MSDS Database Up to Date

Chemical manufacturers and importers are required to send you an MSDS at first shipment and whenever there's a change. Even so, MSDS information at many companies is out of date. That may be because manufacturers send only the original MSDS and not the revised version. Or it may be because the revised MSDS gets lost or misplaced at shipment, especially if the person who takes shipment isn't familiar with the MSDS system.

Compliance Strategy: Go through each MSDS at your workplace and make sure it's current. If it's more than a year- or two-old, you should ask the manufacturer to send a revised one or get it from the company's website.

3. Make Sure MSDS Has All Required Information

An MSDS may not list all the information the law requires, especially if the MSDS was prepared on site. Sometimes the omitted information can be critical. So go through each MSDS at your workplace and ensure it contains:

- Chemical and common names of all ingredients considered health hazards;
- Physical and chemical characteristics of hazardous chemicals such as vapor pressure and flash point;
- Physical hazards such as potential for fire or explosion;
- Health hazards including signs and symptoms of exposure and medical conditions that exposure may aggravate;
- Primary routes of entry into human beings;
- Permissible exposure limits;
- Whether the chemical is considered a carcinogen;
- Precautions for safe use and handling including appropriate protective measures during repair and maintenance of contaminated equipment and procedures for spills or leaks;
- Control measures such as appropriate protective equipment and work practices;



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- Emergency and first aid procedures; and
- Date of preparation of the MSDS and contact information of company or person who prepared the MSDS.

Compliance Strategy: It usually takes at least 3 pages to fit in all this information. If an MSDS is shorter than three pages, it could be an indicator that certain information is missing.

4. Avoid Inconsistencies and Techno-Babble

Check each MSDS for inconsistencies (for example, calling a product a liquid in one place and a gas in another). Also be on the lookout for an overload of dense technical jargon. Remember that an MSDS won't help if workers can't understand it. To make the MSDS easier to read, consider creating a "summary sheet" that highlights the product's properties and hazards. But be careful: If you change the substance of an MSDS prepared by a manufacturer, you may become liable for the contents.

Conclusion

One more word of advice: To make the MSDS easier to understand, consider creating a "summary sheet" that highlights the hazards of specific chemicals. But attach the summary to the actual MSDS so workers have access to all the information if they want it.



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