

EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE

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TARGET ON SAFETY

Know the Hazards in Your Classroom

Introduction

Your classroom is full of potentially hazardous materials. **In order to keep yourself and your students safe, it is important that you are aware of the chemicals in your room and understand how to safely handle them.** If you ensure that all materials are used as they were intended and that all safety precautions are followed, then you can maintain a safe and healthy classroom environment.

Hazard Communication is designed to do just as the name suggests: communicate hazard information to each of our staff members. You need to know what chemicals you are working with or exposed to, hazards associated with each chemical and how to protect yourself. This education is accomplished through a variety of means so we want to review our program with you today. **Remember that your students may also handle or be exposed to many of these chemicals, so you will need to teach some of this safety information to them as well.**

Hazardous Material Defined

Hazardous material is defined as items that have a physical or health hazard associated with them. For instance, flammable, combustible or explosive materials are physically hazardous. In the same sense, materials that are carcinogenic, toxic, corrosive and/or irritating are considered health hazards. This definition captures many of the materials we use in our school, including cleaning products, art supplies (such as paint and glue), and various others.

Hazard Determination

You may wonder who determines what is "hazardous" or not. The process of hazard determination is very scientific, is guided by strict federal requirements and has proven itself to be extremely reliable. The manufacturer of the hazardous material has the most information about their products and is required to provide this information to users of that material, like us. There are severe penalties for chemical manufacturers who do not provide complete or accurate information through their safety data sheets (SDS).

The Chemical Inventory

We maintain a listing (inventory) of all the materials that have physical or health hazards at our facility. This helps to ensure that we have all the necessary SDS. Our employees are an important factor in keeping the inventory current. Any time a new material is brought into the company, we need to make sure it is added to the chemical inventory if it has a physical or health hazard. **If you bring a new material into your classroom, please make sure your supervisor knows about it so the chemical inventory can be updated.**

Safety Data Sheets: The Most Important Documents

SDS are the most important documents we have concerning the chemicals used in our school. These are the documents the chemical manufacturer prepares to inform the end-users (you and me) about any hazards associated with a product. SDS are required to summarize certain information, including product identification, scientific information about ingredients, hazards associated with the product, incompatibilities, potential reactions, safe handling and storage, and spills guidelines.



The most important sections focus on first aid requirements and personal protective equipment. If you have never read an SDS, then that's something you need to do when you and your supervisor review the specific hazardous materials used in your department and classroom.

Your supervisor will show you where all the SDS are located and will help you navigate through them. **It is important for you to familiarize yourself with the SDS for any hazardous material found in your classroom, so that you can understand the risks and take precautions.** In addition, you should understand the SDS so you know how to find information quickly when you need it, such as in the event of a spill or accident.

Labeling Requirements

Our first line of defense with any type of material is the label found on the product container. It is critically important that every container be labeled so it properly identifies the material inside. At the very least, the label must identify the product and any related hazards, such as it being corrosive, flammable or an irritant. Further information identifying appropriate personal protective equipment is useful as well.

Generally, there is not a concern about the primary container being appropriately labeled. Manufacturers will make sure the primary container is labeled properly, and there is never a reason to remove a label from a primary container.

However, we need to always make sure secondary containers are also labeled. For instance, if we pour some all-purpose cleaner from the primary one-gallon container into a pistol-grip sprayer, we need to label the pistol-grip sprayer (the secondary container) with all the right information. Simply labeling the bottle as "cleaner" is not sufficient; more detail is necessary. Your supervisor will help you with any labeling requirements.

Summary

Let's all remember that the chemicals we work with have a potential for danger. Most materials you encounter are generally safe, but it's important to know the possible hazards of any substance in order to maintain a safe classroom environment. Our hazard communication program is designed to keep you up to date on all the hazardous materials we have in the facility, and how to use those materials safely. **In addition, sometimes the best defense is choosing less hazardous products, particularly when purchasing your own cleaning or art supplies.** Refer to the label to determine potential hazards in any product you buy.

When you have questions regarding materials, make sure you ask them before using the material or bringing it into your classroom. Never make assumptions about any chemical you are using and always remain properly and fully informed about the material. **In order for our hazard communication program to be effective, you need to take responsibility for using the information provided in order to keep yourself and your students safe.**