



# Safety Bulletin

## Supervisor Awareness of Chemical Safety

Presently, there are very few jobs that do not involve the use of some chemicals. School district clerical staff is exposed to printer and copier inks and toners, rubber cement, liquid paper correction fluid and other chemical products.



Maintenance and custodial workers utilize a host of chemicals such as acid, caustic cleaners, paints and solvents on a daily basis. As a supervisor, your job is to ensure that these chemicals are used, stored, transported and labeled properly and that the chemicals are used consistent with the requirements of the chemical label and Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). Your basic challenge is to ensure that none of your workers use any chemicals until they have received the **required safety training**.

Recently, two member school districts have had unfortunate experiences with the improper use of chemicals by workers. These member districts will need to reevaluate their chemical use and handling policy. Listed below is information that supervisors should remember:

### Proper Use of Chemicals

Chemicals present several types of hazards. Improper use of chemicals and lack of appropriate personal protective equipment can result in employee injury, illness or property damage.

To properly use chemicals, workers:

- need to understand the physical properties, health hazards and reactivity of each chemical. These are found in the Material Safety Data Sheet or MSDS.
- must read and comprehend the MSDS of each chemical utilized.
- must have on file a MSDS for every chemical they use, **regardless of where it purchased** because these chemicals are being utilized for commercial application on a school site.
- must be trained on how to select, use and maintain personal protective equipment (PPE).
- wear the appropriate (PPE).
- must know the limitations of PPE. (PPE equipment may include chemical specific gloves, respirators, safety goggles, face shields or aprons).
- be aware of what chemicals contractors bring to their worksite.
- must inform the contractor of the district's hazard communication program requirement. (The contractor is responsible for notifying the school district of each chemical utilized and providing the MSDS for each chemical they are bringing on site.)



### Transportation of Chemicals

- Only the smallest amount of chemical needed should be used at the worksite. Sometimes this means transferring chemicals from large to smaller containers. These smaller containers should have liquid tight lids and be approved for the specific chemical stored. Although it is not required to label smaller containers if the contents will be under the control of the worker at all times and not stored at the worksite, it is best to provide proper identification of the contents.
- NEVER transfer chemicals into food or beverage containers such as soda bottles or coffee cans.
- Flammable liquid should be stored in shatterproof containers-never glass.

## Storing Chemicals Safely

- Hazardous chemicals must be properly stored when not in use.
- All containers should be checked to ensure that vapors would not escape.
- Never allow open containers in storage areas.
- Flammable liquids may only be stored in approved flammable storage lockers.
- Bulk storage of flammable liquids may be stored in large drums. The dispensing points must have grounding straps for the drum units to ensure there is no static spark generated when filling smaller containers.
- Chemicals that are reactive with each other, such as acids and bases, must never be stored together.



In the school environment, it is imperative that chemicals are appropriately stored and secured out of reach of children. Many times we find chemicals stored under sinks in classrooms that are immediately accessible to children. These chemicals are being used inconsistent with the label/MSDS safety requirements. The chemicals in some instances are being brought onto the site without the knowledge of the site administrator. That is why it is imperative to perform periodic chemical safety inspections.

## Labeling of Chemicals



- Always ensure that chemicals are properly labeled in accordance with the school district's hazard communication labeling program.
- Know where you can obtain labels and stickers.
- Stored chemicals should have the label visible from the front.
- Test your workers' knowledge on what the labels say and ask them what safety and health hazards exist for the chemicals they are using. If they don't know, train them on the spot!

## OSHA Basic Requirements for Hazards Communication

1. That material safety data sheets are readily accessible during each work shift.
2. School districts have and maintain a written hazard communication program.
3. Secondary container labeling requirements.
4. Employees are provided information and training on chemicals in the workplace at the initial assignment and any time a new product is introduced into the workplace.
5. Employees shall be informed of any operation in their workplace where hazardous substances are present.
6. Employees must receive information on hazardous substances to which they are, or may be exposed.

The SIPE office is available for review, assistance with implementation and training for Hazard Communication Programs.

**Special Note:** The SIPE office has videos and on line training courses available with information on MSDSs and Hazard Communication. Supervisors should review Title 8 General Industry Safety Orders Section 5194 Hazard Communication and become familiar with the section.

*This Hazard Alert/Safety Bulletin is intended to provide general safety guidelines to SIPE member school districts. Only the fundamentals of safety are discussed herein. Under no circumstance should this Hazard Alert/Safety Bulletin be used as an exclusive source of information on the topic. School district staff must study current district policies and procedures and national, state and local codes, laws and ordinances.*