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Safety Matters

Chemical Safety in the Workplace

There's a good chance that your workplace has cleaning products, paints, pesticides, fertilizers, solvents, heating and cooling system additives, snow melt, and other potentially hazardous materials that are used regularly. These substances may be harmful, especially if used, stored, or mixed improperly. It's important to know the hazards associated with these chemicals, what personal protective equipment you need, how to use and store them properly, and what to do in the event of a spill or accidental contact. The key components of a sample chemical safety program are described below.



1. Hazard Communication Program (Right to Know)

Your employer is required to provide training on any and all hazardous materials in your workplace. This program is there to protect you and prevent injuries. Make sure that you ask for proper training on your Haz Com policies and procedures, especially when new chemicals or operations are brought into the areas in which you work, including substances brought in by outside contractors.

2. Safety Data Sheets (SDS)

Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) are often known as the key to chemical safety and should be available for all hazardous materials in your workplace. Be sure that you know where the SDSs are located and how to use and understand the hazards associated with the chemicals you work around. SDSs include key sections such as first aid measures, handling and storage, physical and chemical properties, accidental release measures, and more.



3. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

It is your employer's responsibility to assess the hazards in your workplace, provide you with any required PPE as outlined in the SDS, and to train you on how to use, maintain, inspect, and store your PPE. It is your job to wear your PPE and to clean and maintain it properly. Inspect your PPE regularly and make sure to alert your supervisor of any signs of wear or defects. Proper use and care of PPE is critical to chemical safety.

4. Labeling

Labels are there to protect you. Reading and following the instructions and warnings on labels is critical to your safety. You should understand the meaning of the nine pictograms that are used to describe a hazardous material. If you don't, ask your supervisor.

