

# CHEMICAL WARNING LABELS

## *Essential Personal Safety*

From corrosive industrial cleaners to toner in the office copier, hazardous chemicals are common in every workplace. Your company's Hazard Communication, or HazCom, program was created to protect you from overexposure to dangerous chemicals. The three most important parts of your HazCom program are: training on the safe usage and handling of chemicals, Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs), and chemical warning labels.

### The Purpose of Labeling

The warning label provides important information about a chemical and is attached to the container itself. While you can get the same information (and more) from a MSDS, only a warning label can tell you exactly which chemical is inside that particular container. A warning label communicates to you and others. When you transfer a hazardous chemical, the label you put on the new container protects others who may use the chemical in the future—including you!

### Label Information

The most important information on the label is a single word indicating how hazardous the chemical is. "Danger" means it is the most hazardous kind of chemical. "Warning" is somewhat less hazardous, and "Caution" is the least. But even chemicals labeled "Caution" can be harmful to your health if you do not follow proper procedures.

Labels must list basic information

such as the chemical's name; whether or not it's flammable; the name, address, and phone of the manufacturer or distributor; a list of the chemical's ingredients; target organs that could be affected by the chemical and other information such as:

- How reactive the chemical is (when it catches fire, explodes, or becomes a dangerous gas)
- If the chemical is radioactive
- What kind of fire extinguisher to use in case of fire
- Protective equipment you should wear when using the chemical
- Procedures for usage, handling, storage, and disposal
- Critical first aid instructions
- How to handle spills and leaks

### Torn Or Missing Labels

The most dangerous chemical is one without a label. Never handle a chemical until you know what it is. If a label is missing, immediately tell your supervisor who can find out what the chemical is and label it appropriately.

If a label is torn or damaged, it can lead to serious consequences. The one piece of information you need to protect yourself may be torn off or illegible.

The Federal HazCom Standard allows containers without labels under specific circumstances, but you must always be able to tell what is in the container. In some cases, a notice will be posted next to the



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container or on the process sheet. Your city or state may also have regulations about chemical warning labels.

### To Read Warning Labels

Always read the label *before* you begin a job using a potentially hazardous chemical. Even if you've used the chemical before, the manufacturer may have changed the formula or concentration. If you have more questions about the chemical, read the Material Safety Data Sheet—it provides valuable information, often in greater detail than the warning label. Remember, if you make it a habit to read *all* labels, you'll be confident that your health and safety are protected.