

Chemicals in the Workplace – WHMIS*



WHMIS is the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System.

WHMIS is a national communication standard that works with provincial authorities to get information to workers. These relate to the requirements of the Hazardous Products Act and Regulations (HPAR) which controls the importation, storage, and use of hazardous products.

Why is it important?

Chemicals pose a wide variety of hazards to workers, the workplace, and the environment. Depending on the chemical, they can be corrosive, they can cause health effects such as the inability to breathe, cancers, and dangers to the nervous system. If they are improperly stored in the workplace, chemicals can also cause fires, explosions, and the release of toxic gases. Chemicals and their hazardous waste can also impact the environment, by contaminating nearby waterways, affecting wildlife and plants.

WHMIS provides required information and training to help prevent these hazards.

Key characteristics

WHMIS has four elements:

- Classification of hazardous products
- Education and training programs
- Labelling
- Safety Data Sheets (SDS)

The Hazardous Product Act (HPA) classifies hazardous products as either physical hazards or health hazards.

An example of a physical hazard is a flammable gas, e.g., propane. An example of a health hazard is a substance that causes skin corrosion/irritation e.g., bleach.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (OHSR) Part 5 outline requirements for WHMIS education and training. WHMIS education deals with worker rights and responsibilities, hazards of the product, and the content requirements for labels and SDS. WHMIS training covers items such as the procedures for the safe use, storage, handling, and disposal of hazardous products, and procedures to follow in case of an emergency involving the hazardous product.

Labelling deals with the requirements for suppliers and workplace labels on hazardous products. The labels and their associated pictograms provide key safety information.

SDS provides detailed information such as the hazards posed by the product, storage requirements, and handling, first aid, accidental release measures etc.

Preventive next steps

- All staff must be provided with WHMIS education and staff working with hazardous products must receive WHMIS training.

- SDS must be made readily available to workers.
- All hazardous products must have either a supplier label or a workplace label.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) required by the SDS must be supplied by the employer.
- If workers must clean up a hazardous substance, the employer must provide an adequate safe work procedure, PPE, and other material necessary for the control and disposal of hazardous substances.
- Workers are trained in appropriate emergency procedures and drills are conducted when dealing with hazardous products.



For additional resources visit:

[Occupational Health and Safety Regulation Part 5](#) Chemical Agents and Biological Agents

[WHMIS Online course](#)

[CCOHS website](#) WHMIS program

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