

Cleaning Up

Risk Management Information for Janitorial Services from The Hartford

Hazardous Chemicals and Employees Don't Mix – Avoid the Hazards and Improve Safety at Work

Most people wouldn't make a strong connection between hazardous chemicals and janitorial work. But your employees may handle, transport and store a number of potentially hazardous chemicals in the products they use routinely each day in their work.

The more you and your employees know about the hazardous chemicals used in your operation, the safer your workers will be. Just one injury can have serious repercussions for your business. If one of your employees is injured on the job, you face increased workers' compensation costs as well as the possibility of costs to hire and train a replacement worker. This can quickly have a negative impact on your bottom line. An effective Hazard Communication Program (HCP) can help you limit these costs by making your employees' work environment safer.

Know the Dangers

Every day, your employees come in contact with many products that have the potential to cause severe injury, illness or even death. Knowing the dangers these products may cause as well as the proper and safe way to use, handle and store them will help you to plan a program to help protect your employees. For example, did you know:

- **Corrosive materials** (hydrochloric acid, sodium hydroxide and others) found in toilet bowl cleaners, general-purpose cleaners or wax removers can cause severe burns to the eyes and skin?

- **Flammable materials** (toluene, isopropanol, flammable propellants and others) found in floor strippers and vandalism removers, if improperly handled or stored can cause fires?
- **Harmful materials** (2-butoxyethanol, perchloroethylene and others) found in general purpose cleaners; floor strippers or carpet spotters can cause severe damage to internal organs from skin absorption and inhalation?
- **Incompatible ingredients** (like ammonia and bleach) when combined can create harmful vapors or gases that can cause severe injury or death?

An Effective Hazard Communication Program is Key

Knowing the potential dangers of harmful chemicals and protecting your employees from exposure is essential to preventing injuries and workers' compensation losses. A Hazard Communication Program can help ensure that you and your employees:

- Recognize hazardous materials and understand how to handle them.
- Understand and use warning labels and Material Safety Data Sheets.
- Select and use appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Develop and implement the training that is essential to working safely with hazardous materials.

Safety at Work

Designing Your Hazard Communication Program

An effective Hazard Communication Program can help you to prevent chemical injuries and illnesses and provide your employees with a safer, more productive workplace. The following steps can help you design an effective program for your operation.

1. Develop a complete list of all hazardous chemicals used by your employees.

Designate a person to be responsible for maintaining and updating the list periodically. Properly dispose of all materials whose expiration date has passed.

2. Verify that you have a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for each hazardous chemical.

The MSDS for each substance provides information about its hazardous effects and physical and chemical characteristics, the required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and appropriate emergency and first aid procedures. MSDSs must be conveniently accessible to all employees at all times – many operations keep MSDSs in a centrally located binder at each job site, as well as a master copy at their headquarters. Be sure that each employee knows the location of the MSDSs and how to read them. Designate a person to be responsible for maintaining and updating the Material Safety Data Sheets on a regular basis.

3. Verify that all containers of hazardous chemicals have appropriate labels.

Labels should state the identity of the material and appropriate hazardous warnings. Each label should also provide the name and address of the chemical manufacturer, importer, or other responsible party. Pictorial warnings may be appropriate if language could be a barrier to employees' understanding of the hazard.

4. Develop an effective training and education component for your HCP.

OSHA's minimum guidelines state that training must be done upon hire and whenever a new hazard is introduced. It is good business practice to go above and beyond these guidelines. Those providing the training must not only understand MSDSs, warning labels and related terminology, but also be able to explain these issues to employees in terms (and languages) they can understand. Your employees' safety rests on their being able to read and understand warning labels and instructions.

All training should be documented. Make sure that employees sign-off after receiving required training. It is imperative that all employees are able to recognize the potential hazards to which they are exposed and know the appropriate measures to take to protect themselves from harm.

An Action Plan to Further Reduce Your Risk

Be smart. Put these ideas to work in your operation and improve safety while reducing risk.

- Whenever possible, substitute less toxic alternatives for traditional toxic products.
- Dilute hazardous material, when possible, to minimize its harmful effects. Use mild concentrates for general cleaning and stronger concentrations only when necessary.
- Assign supervisors to dilute chemical products. Prohibit any employees from mixing chemical products. The results could be deadly.
- Ensure that eyewash bottles are carried in janitorial carts. The bottles should contain clean water and be identified clearly. Safety supply vendors offer these clearly labeled EYE WASH bottles. This simple procedure could save an employee's eyesight.

- Supply appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and make sure that your employees use it when necessary. For example, provide goggles rather than basic safety glasses to protect against splashing. If protective gloves are needed, check the MSDS or contact the manufacturer to ensure that you have the appropriate gloves for the specific chemical. Protective gloves vary widely in composition and intended use. They do not all offer the same level of protection.
- Implement changes that reduce the need to use chemical products. For example, place doormats near entrances and vacuum them frequently to reduce the need to wash and treat the floors.
- Comply with OSHA and state occupational safety and health requirements.

Instituting an effective Hazard Communication Program will keep your employees up-to-date and informed about the dangers and proper use of the products they handle. Appropriate personal protective equipment and reduced use of potentially hazardous substances can make the workplace safer.

Just a Reminder

In addition to protecting your employees, it is also important to protect the public and the environment. Be sure to properly store chemicals in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The storage area should be locked and inaccessible to the public. Lastly, storage and disposal of all chemicals must be in accordance with local, state and federal regulations.

For more information on risk management for your business, or The Hartford's Janitorial Services Program, visit mb.thehartford.com/janitorsnews.

For more information on Hazard Communications,

visit the OSHA Web site at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/hazard-communications/index.html>. Review OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) to understand its application to your operation.

Your state may have occupational safety and health requirements that may be more stringent than OSHA's. Contact your state labor office to determine the applicability of state laws to your operation. You can also identify your state's requirements at <http://www.osha.gov/fso/osp/index.html>

Additional information on the selection and proper handling of janitorial products may be found in the Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project online workbook *How to Select and Use Safe Janitorial Chemicals: In-Depth Workshop for Custodians, Janitorial Contractors, Facility Managers*, EH&S Staff, July 29, 1999 at <http://www.westp2net.org/Janitorial/workshop.htm> as of March 26, 2003. (JP4 is sponsored by US EPA State of California, Santa Clara County, the City of Richmond and local government agencies. Written by Thomas Barron, Carol Berg and Linda Bookman. 6/99).

This document is provided for information purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for individual legal counsel or advice on issues discussed within. Readers seeking resolution of specific legal issues or business concerns related to the captioned topics should consult their attorney and/or insurance representative.

Risk Management Information for Janitorial Services from The Hartford

Cleaning Up



Hartford Plaza
Hartford, CT 06115