

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Cleaning industry - Chemicals

Why can chemical usage be a problem?

Chemicals are widely used in the cleaning industry. Some of them have the potential to cause harm through contact with the skin, eyes or breathing in the vapours or fumes. Exposure can result in a number of health problems, including respiratory and skin problems. Some of these health affects may be immediate, but for many it can take some time to show signs of ill health.

In addition to the general need to keep people safe from all chemicals, there are specific legal requirements for managing chemicals that are classified as hazardous substances. Some hazardous substances commonly used in the cleaning industry are carpet cleaners and spotters, oven cleaners and bleach. The Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), available from manufacturers or suppliers of the chemicals, will indicate if the chemicals are designated as a hazardous substance.

The legal requirements include:

- Obtaining a MSDS.
- Labelling containers.
- Doing risk assessments and documenting them.
- Keeping a register containing a list of all hazardous substances used at the workplace and a MSDS for each substance.
- Providing training to workers on the substances they are exposed to.
- Reducing exposure to the lowest level possible and never allowing exposure over the relevant national exposure standard.
- Ensuring that the MSDS is not changed.

- Keeping the MSDS close to where the substances are used.

Some possible solutions for chemical issues

When choosing the measures to manage the use of chemicals, the product's MSDS is the best source of information. These data sheets will help to identify any potential health and safety effects and the precautions to follow when using the chemical. They also provide information on safe handling, storage and disposal, and first aid instructions in the event of exposure. If you can't get a MSDS for a substance (for example, if you purchase it from a retail outlet) then the label can be a useful source of information. If you can't get enough information from the label, there is usually a contact number for the manufacturer, so you can request the MSDS.

If, after reading the MSDS, you decide that there are risks associated with using a chemical, or having it in the workplace, you will need to eliminate or reduce the risks. The best way to do this is to ask yourself:

- Is it possible to stop using the chemical altogether?
- Can another less dangerous chemical be used instead?

If this isn't possible to do either of these things, then you will need look at other ways to manage the risks. Some possible solutions might include:

- installing a self-diluting system to prevent contact with the chemicals
- providing proper storage facilities
- having regular clean-outs of storage cupboards to remove old, empty or leaky containers and dispose of them correctly

- ensuring that all chemicals are in appropriate containers and properly labelled
- if decanting substances into smaller containers, make sure that the new containers are labelled properly with the product's name and any safety information
- following the manufacturer's instruction for use
- providing adequate ventilation, either natural or mechanical
- training your workers in safe handling procedures and first aid in case of accidents
- providing the personal protective equipment specified on the MSDS.

Some cleaning products are also flammable and may cause a fire or explosion if there is an ignition source such as:

- static electricity or electrical sparks
- cigarettes, naked lights

- electrical switches, lighting and non-flameproof electrical equipment.

Therefore, keep such ignition sources away from areas where flammable cleaning products are being used and stored. The MSDS will tell you if the product is flammable.

Remember that if any of the chemicals are designated hazardous substances, or stated dangerous goods, you must fulfil the legal requirements mentioned previously. An example of a documented risk assessment is attached for your guidance.

For further information on hazardous substances and general workplace health and safety issues call 1300 369 915 or visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au.

For further information on dangerous goods management visit the Department of Emergency Services website at www.emergency.qld.gov.au/chem

© The State of Queensland (Department of Justice and Attorney-General) 2011

Copyright protects this document. The State of Queensland has no objection to this material being reproduced, but asserts its right to be recognised as author of the original material and the right to have the material unaltered.

The material presented in this publication is distributed by the Queensland Government as an information source only. The State of Queensland makes no statements, representations, or warranties about the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and the reader should not rely on it. The Queensland Government disclaims all responsibility and all liability (including, without limitation, liability in negligence) for all expenses, losses, damages and costs you might incur as a result of the information being inaccurate or incomplete in any way, and for any reason.