Dry cleaning and laundry industry - Chemicals

What are some of the harmful chemicals used in dry cleaning and laundries?

Chemicals are used everyday in dry cleaning and laundries and some of these have the potential to injure people or make them sick. These chemicals are called hazardous substances. Some common hazardous substances used by laundries and dry cleaners include:

Product name and where used/found	Hazardous ingredient
Perc – dry cleaning agent	**Perchloroethylene**
Fluro – dry cleaning agent for fragile fabrics	**Freon**
Spotting agents – manual spotting of resistant stains	**Hydrofluoric acid**
Bleaching agents	**Hydrogen peroxide** **Sodium hypochlorite**
Souring agents	**Hydrochloric acid** **Phosphoric acid** **Acetic acid**
Alkaline salts	**Sodium metasilicate** **Sodium carbonate**

These are only some of the chemicals you might be using. You need to identify and control all the harmful chemicals used in your business.

I have some hazardous substances – what do I need to do about them?

If you store or use hazardous substances you need to:

- make sure all chemical containers have a label on them, clearly identifying what chemical is in the container and the main safety information about the chemical (e.g. 'Flammable', 'Toxic if swallowed', 'Avoid contact with skin'). Do not use old drink or food containers to store chemicals

- obtain a material safety data sheet (MSDS) from your chemical supplier for all the hazardous substances in the workplace
- keep a list of all the chemicals in the front of the register, as well as a copy of the data sheets.
- read the MSDS and do a written hazardous substances risk assessment to help you find ways to use the chemical safely. It is a good idea to keep the written risk assessment with the MSDS in your hazardous substances register. An example risk assessment is attached to this info sheet
- implement the solutions identified in your risk assessment to ensure safe use of the chemical
- train people in safe chemical use
- ensure the MSDS and risk assessments are available for reference at all times by workers using the chemicals.

How do I make it safe to use the chemicals I have?

When you do a risk assessment for each chemical, you need to decide on the safest way to use it. Some questions to consider when making these decisions include:

- **Can I get rid of the chemical altogether?** If you don't need it, get rid of it. You may even be able to change your dry cleaning or laundering processes to make some chemicals unnecessary.
- **Can the chemical be substituted for something less harmful?** Chemical manufacturers are frequently developing new products that do the same job but are less harmful. There may be alternative processes using less harmful chemicals.
- **Can I prevent people coming in contact with the chemical?** For example, it may be possible to have cleaning chemicals automatically pumped into washers, eliminating the need for workers to do it by hand. Similarly, if chemicals need to be diluted or mixed, buying them pre-diluted or mixed will eliminate the need for your workers to do this by hand.
- **Do I have adequate ventilation to remove chemical fumes?** Some chemicals, such as perchloroethylene, can give off vapour that people can inhale. The MSDS will tell you if this is possible. If it is, you might be able to remove the vapour from the workplace through an exhaust system or by increasing the flow of fresh air into the area. IMPORTANT: Don't rely on being able to smell a chemical to know if people are breathing in vapours, as some chemicals have very little to no odour.
- **Do I have work procedures that limit people's exposure to the chemical?** Developing good work procedures can help minimise people's exposure to chemicals. For example, make sure you:
    - keep equipment properly maintained to prevent leaks
    - store flammable chemicals away from heat sources
    - have chemical spill procedures in place
    - do work involving chemicals when there are no other people around the area
    - train people how to use the chemical safely.
- **Have I provided the right protective equipment to people using the chemicals?** If you can't prevent people being exposed to a chemical in any other way, you must provide people with the right personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, masks, aprons). The right protective equipment for each chemical is set out in the MSDS for that chemical.

For more information on chemicals and general obligations workplace health and safety issues call 1300 369 915 or visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

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