

OSHA Hazard Communication Standard – Key Terms

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)¹ hazard communication standard, also known as the “employee right-to-know” standard, is designed to help protect workers from exposure to harmful chemicals. OSHA requires employers to inform employees about the chemical effects associated with the hazardous products we use at work.

Hazard communication key words

Below are common key terms and definitions to help educate employees about potential hazards in the workplace.

Toxic

- Overexposure to toxic chemicals can have a poisonous effect on a person. For example, prolonged exposure to arsenic is toxic to kidneys, lungs, and the nervous system.

Carcinogen

- Carcinogens are believed to cause cancer if an individual is overexposed.

Irritant

- A chemical may aggravate living tissue (such as dermatitis) at the site of contact.

Corrosive

- A chemical may visibly destroy living tissue at the site of contact. For example, battery acid is corrosive and will “burn” your skin.

Sensitizer

- A chemical may cause an allergic reaction after repeated exposures. For example, isocyanates in some paints and foam products are a sensitizer.

Acute Effects

- The effects of short-term overexposure to a particular chemical occur quickly and are typically temporary.

Chronic Effects

- The effects of long-term overexposure to a particular chemical are typically permanent.

Flammable Liquid

- A liquid that emits enough vapors to catch on fire and burn at relatively low temperatures.

Combustible Liquid

- A liquid that must be heated to 100 degrees Fahrenheit, or higher, to emit enough vapors to catch on fire and burn.

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Q&A

Here are some questions to help start conversations around Hazard Communication in your workplace:

- Do all employees receive hazard communication training upon initial assignment?
- Are all chemical containers on this jobsite clearly labeled?
- Are Safety Data Sheets (SDS) available for all chemicals in the workplace?
- Do departments maintain an inventory of chemicals utilized in their work location(s)?
- Are supervisors minimizing the use of hazardous chemicals when possible?
- Are you provided with appropriate personal protective equipment?
- All employees must receive refresher training on the revised Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) to facilitate understanding and recognition of the new requirements.

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¹Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Standard 1910.1200, 2018