

## **Material Safety Data Sheets**

Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS's) are very important documents. Every workplace should have accessible MSDS's for all hazardous materials that are used or stored. Read the MSDS before you begin using the material. If you have the responsibility for procuring hazardous material, you should obtain an advance copy of the MSDS to review the safety information before the order is placed. Many companies require approval of hazardous materials before they are purchased.

Everyone who uses it should review the MSDS. You wouldn't want to wait for an emergency to learn about the material's hazardous properties! Suppose that a coworker splashed a chemical onto their face and was transported to the hospital with severe burns. The physician will want to know whatever information they can get about the ingredients and hazards of that chemical immediately. What information could you tell a physician right now about each chemical that you use? How fast can you obtain a current copy of the MSDS if the physician requests it? Perhaps if everybody familiarized themselves with the MSDS prior to using the chemical, the accident would have been prevented.

MSDSs also tell you what personal protective equipment is required when using the material, as well as conditions to avoid when working with the material – such as heat and sparks. MSDS's also tell you what materials should not be brought into contact with the hazardous material. The MSDS also provides valuable information for storage and disposal of the material.

Another thing to be aware of is that mistakes can and do happen. If you are using a material that doesn't seem to fit the description on its MSDS, do not use the material but contact your site's safety personnel immediately. There could have been a mix-up in the labeling or the information on the MSDS. The material may also be out-of-spec and could be dangerous to use as you were planning.

MSDS's have proven to be very valuable tools in protecting people from hazards. They provide a wealth of information in a convenient form. But MSDS's are only as useful as you make them.