



## INFORMATIONAL BROCHURE EMPLOYEE SAFETY

### *Subject: Working with Chemicals*

In Pennsylvania, there is safety regulation regarding working with chemicals titled Worker and Community Right to Know. It is a copy of the Federal OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) standard Hazard Communication. There are certain rights and obligations that workers using chemicals in the workplace need to be familiar with in order to be safe.

Under the regulation, any chemical used in the workplace should have a material safety data sheet (MSDS) accompanying its entry into the facility. This information sheet gives you important data about the chemical's hazards, symptoms of overexposure, how to protect yourself when using the material/hazardous substance, and what to do if involved in accident with the chemical. These MSDS sheets should be placed in a binder, organized in alphabetical order by trade name, and available to all employees throughout the work day without them having to ask a supervisor for the binder, having to go into an office or even accessing a filing cabinet for the information.

Before working with any chemical, and this applies to both custodial and maintenance staff primarily but also foodservice (detergents used to clean dish wear are pretty potent in concentrated form), you need to review the specific MSDS. What you should check for are: dangers of the substance, how to protect yourself and check listing of personal protective equipment (PPE) you will need to use (your employer is responsible for providing the necessary PPE), symptoms of over exposure, and how to treat injuries. The employee is responsible for this follow-up but supervisors need to monitor compliance.

In Pennsylvania, training on Worker and Community Right to Know needs to be completed in some form on an *annual* basis. You have choice of classroom, tutorial, supervisor safety talk, or whatever provides results that (1) list of people who attended training, (2) you have copy of the material you covered, and (3) confirm that employees have basic understanding of the regulation. In addition, as a manager, you would want to confirm through routine job observations that employees are following proper safety procedures. No shortcuts here. Oftentimes, chemicals are unforgiving if misused or mishandled. And, some individuals develop allergic reactions to chemicals even if using properly. Pay attention. An ounce of prevention here is worth a pound of cure, to use an old saw.

Other elements of this program include: have a written program, choosing a program coordinator (point of contact and program administrator), annual review of all MSDS files in the District, coordinating activities with outside contractors (information exchange here on any work done in the District involving chemicals), making sure everyone knows the importance of labeling all containers (one label per container and it should identify the contents) and having lids/caps in place when not in use, and having the proper personal protective equipment available for workers.

This is one program that is it critical to be proactive. You don't want to have these kinds of injury exposures. Be safe and take the time to do it right.