



Toolbox Talk

WHMIS & Your Right to Know

Picture this: A worker is using an oxygen-acetylene torch to cut off the top of a large metal drum. He thinks the drum is empty, clean, and safe to cut. When the torch flame pierces the drum, it explodes. The torch operator, who is not wearing flame-resistant clothing, receives severe burns to his legs, arms, stomach, and face.

Investigation determines that the drum had not been properly cleaned before it was cut. The torch flame ignited residual contents in the drum, causing an explosion. There was nothing on the drum to indicate what those contents were.

Such incidents are possible in many occupations. Preventing them is the reason why Canada implemented the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS). It was created in response to the right of workers to know about the safety and health hazards that may be associated with the materials or chemicals they use.

WHMIS sets standards for the control, handling, storage and disposal of 'controlled' products. A list of these products can be found under the Hazardous Products Act. Consumer products fall under different legislation and are not controlled by WHMIS.

WHMIS consists of three main parts: labels, Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs), and worker education and training. Its standards are coordinated between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. Controlled products under WHMIS come under six classes, identified by eight symbols (one of the classes has three symbols):

Class A — Compressed gas

Class B — Flammable and combustible material

Class C — Oxidizing material

Class D — Poisonous and infectious material

1. Causing immediate and serious toxic effects
2. Causing other toxic effects
3. Biohazardous infectious material

Class E — Corrosive material.

Class F — Dangerously reactive material

The purpose of labels is to alert workers to the main hazards of controlled products, provide instructions for safe handling and direct them to the MSDS for more information.

The two types of WHMIS labels are the supplier label and the workplace label. Other means of identification may be used where appropriate (such as warning signs, colour codes, placards).

Suppliers, employers and workers all have specified responsibilities in the Hazardous Products Act. Canadian suppliers who sell or import what is considered a “controlled product” under the WHMIS legislation must label the product or container and must provide an MSDS to customers.

A supplier label must contain the following:

- Product identifier
- Supplier identifier
- Statement that an MSDS is available
- Hazard symbols
- Risk phrases (words that describe the main hazards of the product)
- Precautionary measures (how to work with the product safely)
- First aid measures (what to do in an emergency)
- All text in English and French
- The WHMIS hatched border

In addition to establishing education and training programs for workers exposed to hazardous products, employers must make sure the products are labeled, that an MSDS is present for each product and that it is readily available to workers.

A workplace label must appear on all controlled products produced in a workplace or transferred to other containers by the employer. It must include product identifier, information for safe handling and a statement that the MSDS is available.

There are two cases when a workplace label is not necessary. When a controlled material is poured into a container and is going to be used immediately; no label is needed. If the material is “under the control of the person who decanted it” (which means if the person who poured it will be the only one using it) and if the material is all used during one shift, just the product identifier (name) is required.

Workers are required to participate in the training programs and to use this information to help them work safely with hazardous materials. They may also inform employers when labels on containers have been accidentally removed or if the label is no longer readable.

The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

1. Hazardous materials can be found in very few workplaces.

TRUE ____ FALSE ____

2. Are consumer products governed by the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System?

YES ____ NO ____

3. Which of these are the classes of WHMIS controlled products?

- A. Compressed gas
- B. Flammable and combustible material
- C. Oxidizing material
- D. Adhesive material
- E. Poisonous and infectious material
- F. Corrosive material
- G. Dangerously reactive material

4. Labels on WHMIS controlled substances must indicate that Material Safety Data Sheets are available.

TRUE ____ FALSE ____

5. Which of these are the two types of WHMIS labels?

- A. Manufacturer
- B. Supplier
- C. Government
- D. Workplace

6. Are suppliers required to label containers of imported hazardous materials?

YES ____ NO ____

7. Which of these must a supplier label contain?

- A. Hazard symbols
- B. Risk phrases
- C. Precautionary measures
- D. All of the above.

8. Does your work involve the use of materials listed under the Hazardous Products Act?

YES ____ NO ____ DON'T KNOW ____

8. Your answer
ANSWERS: 1. False, 2. No, 3. A., B., C., E., F. G., 4. True, 5. B. and D., 6. Yes, 7. D.,

For the Record

Date of Meeting: _____

Location: _____ Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____

Topic: _____ Meeting Leader: _____

In Attendance *(please print first & last names):*

Construction Safety Association of Manitoba

Head Office: 1447 Waverley Street Winnipeg MB. R3T 0P7 P:204.775.3171
Westman Office: 950-10th Street Brandon MB. R7A 6B5 P:204.728.3456

