

# Recognizing and Understanding Hazardous Chemical Warning Labels

Understanding warning labels will help you to handle and use hazardous chemicals properly and to avoid health and safety problems at the worksite. The Hazard Communication Standard—or HazCom—requires all hazardous chemical containers to have warning labels on them or on a sign placed near the container.

## What You Can Find on a Warning Label

- ◆ the name of the chemical
- ◆ the name, address and telephone number of the manufacturer or importer
- ◆ the chemical code number
- ◆ one of three signal words indicating the danger level of the chemical: “Warning,” “Caution” or “Danger”
- ◆ the word “Poison” if the chemical is highly toxic
- ◆ physical hazards (flammable, explosive, corrosive, etc.)
- ◆ health hazards (eye, lung and skin irritation, burns, etc.)

### *Some warning labels may also show:*

- ◆ how to store the chemical.
- ◆ how to dispose of the chemical.
- ◆ what personal protective equipment to use with the chemical.
- ◆ how to clean up the chemical.
- ◆ how to handle leaks or spills.
- ◆ first aid instructions for exposure.

## Always Read the Label

When you take responsibility for knowing the contents of chemical containers, you protect yourself and every other worker at your worksite.

- ◆ Always read the warning label whenever you use any hazardous chemical. Even if you’ve used the same chemical many times, the manufacturer may have changed the formula or provided the wrong concentration.
- ◆ Avoid identifying chemicals by the label’s color or design alone.
- ◆ If the label raises any questions in your mind about the appropriateness of your environment and protective equipment, check your company’s policy or consult your supervisor before using the chemical.

## Warning Labels Are Everyone’s Responsibility

Making certain that hazardous materials are properly labeled is a responsibility that all workers must share.

- ◆ If you find a container without a label or with a torn or illegible label, report it to your supervisor immediately.
- ◆ Don’t attempt to handle a chemical without a label until you know what it is.
- ◆ If you’re carrying hazardous chemicals in a portable container that someone else might use, label the container to ensure the safety of other workers.



## SAFETY CHECKLIST

- I always read the warning label every time I work with the chemical.
- I make sure each chemical in my area has a label.
- I report missing or illegible labels.
- If I don’t understand the information on the label, I ask for help.
- I always follow the instructions on the label.
- I make sure labels aren’t covered up or removed.
- If I need to know more information about a chemical, I read the MSDS.