



“Let’s Talk Health”

Chemicals

DISCUSSION AID 

INTRODUCTION

This talk has been developed to assist the person facilitating the “Let’s talk health” Week topic on chemicals. It provides pointers to get the conversation started and is not a full explanation of all health and safety requirements, related to this subject, and should not be relied upon as such.

What does the term “workplace chemical” mean to you?

A workplace chemical is any substance, liquid, solid, gas or mist that may cause harm and found in your workplace as a core used item, or through a work process.

Types of chemicals include:

- Solids, dust, fumes, fibres (wood dust, bitumen fumes)
- Liquids and mists (liquid bleach and mineral oil mist)
- Gases (carbon monoxide gas and solvent vapour)

What does routes of exposure mean?

Routes of exposure are the possible ways in which a chemical can enter your body and cause harm, examples are:

- **Inhalation** - Breathing in vapour, fumes, or powder
- **Ingestion** - Directly consuming the substance or by not washing your hands after handling a substance and eating food
- **Absorption** - Substances can access your system through your skin or through a cut on your hand
- **Injection** - The least likely route of exposure but a sharp object containing a harmful substance could pierce your skin

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How can I learn about the hazards of chemicals in my workplace?

A safety data sheet (SDS) is broken down into sections and must be available for any substance produced.

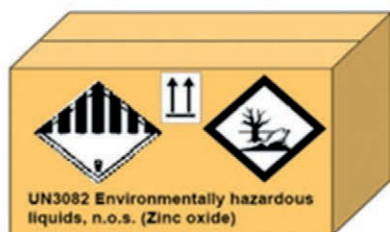
Suppliers of hazardous substances must supply a recent SDS to their Customers and make the SDS available when requested, many are available online, examples of these sections are:

- Hazard identification
- First aid measures
- Firefighting measures
- Accidental release measures
- Handling and storage
- Disposal methods
- Transport information

What are orientation arrows?

Orientation arrows are placed on all composite packages that contain a liquid inner. A composite package would be a cardboard box, with an inner receptacle such as a bottle or jug.

The orientation arrows show the correct direction to keep the box to minimise the potential of unintentional release, turning the liquids upside down could cause a leak.





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COSHH (Control of substances hazardous to health) only applies to chemical producers, true or false?

FALSE

COSHH applies to any workplace that requires control over substances that are hazardous to health.

Ways to prevent workers exposure to hazards are:

- Find out what the health hazards are?
- Decide how to prevent harm (a risk assessment)
- Provide control measures and make sure they are used, remember PPE is the last line of defence, not the first choice!!
- Keep all control measures in good working order, an example could be LEV (local Exhaust ventilation) to remove dust and fumes
- Plan for emergencies, an example is spill drill protocol or evacuation planning



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What is a signal word?

A signal word will appear on the packaging of a substance known to cause harm. There are only ever 2 signal words that appear:

- **WARNING, A LESS SEVERE HAZARD**



Hazard Statements:
Harmful if swallowed

- **DANGER, A MORE SEVERE HAZARD**



Hazard Statements:

- May cause fire or explosion; strong oxidizer
- Causes severe skin burns and eye damage

Hazard and risk are the same, aren't they?

Not quite...

Think of it this way. A bottle of bleach on a shelf is a hazard, while on the shelf, it remains a hazard. Take the bottle, open it up, spill it and start drinking it, now it's a risk, there is the potential for harm.

Chemicals are much the same, they are a hazard, but handle them as described in the safety data sheet and they just always remain a hazard. Mishandle, misuse or take chances with the chemical and its now a risk, and its you, and your Colleagues that are at risk.