

SAFETY

WEEKLY MESSAGE



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HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY

Handling and storing materials – whether it be flammable, combustible or corrosive – involve a variety of actions at work or at home. Properly handling and storing these materials is an important step to maintaining a health and safe working environment.

DEFINING HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

According to Canada's Labour Code, "hazardous substance includes a controlled product and a chemical, biological or physical agent that, by reason of a property that the agent possesses, is hazardous to the safety or health of a person exposed to it." In industrial hygiene, this includes three types of substances: a chemical agent ; a biological agent ; a physical agent.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK

When we do risk assessments at home or at the jobsite, it's important to look at the details of storing hazardous materials in order to mitigate risk. Here are four questions from EHS Today to guide us.

1. WHAT MATERIAL IS BEING STORED?

Understand the physical and chemical properties of a hazardous material. The material may be incompatible with some substances and conditions. For instance, flammable liquids should not be stored with an oxidizing agent. Proper and clear labeling of materials is important to avoid mistakes in usage.

2. WHY IS THE MATERIAL BEING STORED?

Any risk assessment should include ways to eliminate or reduce the risk (i.e., hazardous materials). Whenever practical, find ways to use fewer hazardous substances or reduce the quantity of materials stored.

3. WHERE IS THE MATERIAL BEING STORED?

Ensure that "storage" is clearly defined as a permanent, temporary or transient location. A storage location can be anywhere the container is placed, even if for a short time. In addition, recognize the way in which the material is being moved into and out of the storage location. Would handling fewer containers reduce the chance of a spill? If so, it might be safer to move a pallet with one large container than a pallet with four smaller drums.



4. HOW IS THE MATERIAL BEING STORED?

Determine intended environmental conditions under which the material should be stored. This includes reviewing local, state and federal regulations and a manufacturer's specifications. Regulations and specs, however, may not cover what to do if there are more containers than will fit in a storage cabinet, or what could happen if containers are exposed to heat from sunlight while temporarily stored on a loading dock.

