

Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System



Introduction

The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is Canada's national hazard information and communication standard. It ensures consistency in how information about harmful materials is provided to workers. Employers must meet strict requirements for labelling hazardous materials, and must also provide education to workers about safe handling of those materials.

WHMIS became law through a combination of federal, provincial, and territorial legislation, and came into force on October 31, 1988. In 2015 it was updated to conform to the Globally Harmonized System for Classifications Labels (GHS). GHS applies a global system of classifying and labelling chemicals and communicating their hazards.

Worker education

In addition to meeting rigorous labelling requirements, employers are required to ensure that workers are instructed and trained in:

- the safe handling, use, storage, and disposal of hazardous products and materials
- the purpose and significance of information contained on a product label, workplace label, and safety data sheet
- procedures to follow in case of an accidental spill or emergency.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has developed a training module that explains the roles and responsibilities of suppliers, employers, and workers under WHMIS. The module also provides information about labels, safety data sheets, and the different hazards classes. In addition, workers need job-specific information and training to satisfy worker education requirements under occupational health and safety legislation.

See: CCOHS: https://www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/whmis_workers

CUPE has created a checklist to identify WHMIS best practices and to ensure compliance with occupational health and safety legislation. The checklist can be used by the union, joint health and safety committees (JHSC), and health and safety representatives (HSR).

The information in the checklist does not constitute legal advice, nor does it replace occupational health and safety legislation. If there is any dispute about statutory compliance, please refer to the federal, provincial, or territorial legislation applicable to your workplace.

Which hazardous materials are grouped under physical hazards and health hazards?

PHYSICAL HAZARDS	HEALTH HAZARDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flammable gases • Aerosols • Flammable liquids • Flammable solids • Oxidizing liquids • Oxidizing solids • Organic peroxides • Oxidizing gases • Gases under pressure • Self-reactive substances and mixtures • Pyrophoric liquids • Pyrophoric gases • Self-heating substances and mixtures • Substances and mixtures which, in contact with water, emit flammable gases • Corrosive to metals • Combustible dusts • Simple asphyxiants • Physical hazards not otherwise classified • Chemicals Under Pressure <p>Classification and definitions of these hazards can be found in Part 7 of the federal Hazardous Products Regulations</p>	<p>ACUTE TOXICITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin corrosion/irritation • Serious eye damage/eye irritation • Respiratory or skin sensitivity • Germ cell mutagenicity • Carcinogenicity • Reproductive toxicity • Specific target organ toxicity — single exposure • Specific target organ toxicity — repeated exposure • Aspiration hazard • Biohazardous infectious materials • Health hazards not otherwise classified <p>Classification and definitions of these hazards can be found in Part 8 of the federal Hazardous Products Regulations</p>

How should information on hazardous materials be provided?

There are three ways to provide information on hazardous materials: labels, safety data sheets, and worker education.

1. Product labels (supplier labels)

Suppliers are required to provide cautionary labels on all hazardous products as a condition of sale and import into Canada. With a few exceptions, the minimum content required on a supplier label is:

- **Product identifier** – e.g., the brand name of the product
- **Initial supplier identifier** – name, address, and telephone number of the supplier
- **Pictogram(s)** – Black symbol on a white background framed by a red square set on one of its points (like a diamond). The black symbol is determined by the hazard classification (Exception: The pictogram for biohazardous infectious materials is a black symbol on a white background outlined by a black circle)
- **Signal word** – The words “danger” or “warning” to emphasize the hazards
- **Hazard statement(s)** – A brief statement that describes the nature of the hazard of the product.

EXAMPLES:

- Fatal if swallowed.
 - Causes skin irritation.
 - Highly flammable liquid.
- **Precautionary measures** – A brief phrase that describes the manufacturer’s recommended measures to prevent harm from exposure to or improper handling of the product.

EXAMPLES:

- Wear protective gloves.
 - Store in a well-ventilated place.
 - Dispose of contents in accordance with local regulations.
 - IF SWALLOWED: Immediately call a POISON CENTRE or doctor. Rinse mouth.
- **Supplemental label information** – Further detail on the product, as long as that information does not contradict the standardized hazard information.

2. Safety data sheet (SDS)

A safety data sheet (SDS) is a document prepared by the supplier or manufacturer containing information on:

- the hazardous material (ingredients, known toxicological properties)
- the potential hazards (health, fire, reactivity and environmental)
- how to work safely with the hazardous material (PPE, handling, storage, disposal)
- the steps to take in case of an accident (first aid, fire-fighting).

In Canada, safety data sheets must be produced in French and English by the supplier. There are 16 sections on an SDS. Under Canadian legislation, the requirements to include information under the section headings 12 - Ecological information, 13 - Disposal considerations, 14 - Transport information, and 15 - Regulatory information are optional.

An SDS should be stored with the accompanying hazardous material for all hazardous products in the workplace. It is also a good idea to file a copy of all safety data sheets in a binder kept in an accessible area or maintain electronic copies in case an SDS is damaged or goes missing.

Although safety data sheets do not expire, they must be kept up to date and replaced when the supplier becomes aware of significant new data. Significant new data means new information that:

- changes a product's classification in a category or subcategory of a hazard class,
- result in a product being placed in another hazard class, or
- change the ways to protect against the hazards presented by the product.

If significant new data is obtained by a supplier within 90 days of purchase, the supplier must provide a new SDS or the existing SDS with a document that provides the changes as a result of the significant new data, and the date when the data became available.

The requirement for employers to ensure all SDSs are obtained and updated for the workplace is set out by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial legislation. A table of applicable WHMIS legislation for each jurisdiction is listed at the end of this fact sheet.

3. Worker education

Any workers who may be exposed to hazardous materials have a right to know about the dangers of working with or near these materials. Under WHMIS, the worker's right to know is delivered through information and training.

Information refers to the knowledge regarding the hazards of materials and the WHMIS system. Training is the application of knowledge by instructing the worker how to work with the materials safely. Specific WHMIS education and training requirements are regulated in each jurisdiction.

What is confidential business information (CBI)?

For the purposes of maintaining a trade secret, a supplier or employer can apply for a CBI exemption to withhold information about a chemical ingredient and its concentration on labels and safety data sheets.

The exemption permits suppliers to use the generic chemical name for their product instead of listing its chemical abstracts service number (CAS) or concentration (though they are required to use a range in which the concentration falls within. However, suppliers covered by the exemption still must provide enough information to explain the hazard information disclosed on the SDS.

Applications for CBI exemptions are reviewed by Health Canada to ensure the SDS and label information complies with WHMIS requirements, Health Canada assigns a *Hazardous Materials Information Review Act* (HMIRA) Registry Number to exempted products. This number must be listed on the SDS. **Never use a product that claims CBI or trade secrets and doesn't include a HIMRA Registry Number.**

Are there any hazardous materials not included in WHMIS?

Yes. There are nine categories of materials not covered by WHMIS. While most of these materials do not require an SDS, you should check if the manufacturer has produced one. Sometimes useful information can be found on the manufacturer's website. Remember, if you can't get an SDS, it is a good idea to look at the ingredients of the material to determine if they're dangerous. Your regional health and safety rep can look up information on chemicals if you don't know what they are or can't find any information.

Hazardous materials not covered under WHMIS are:

- consumer products, as defined by the *Canada Consumer Product Safety Act*, including household chemicals and products sold to people for non-commercial purposes in regular stores, in consumer-sized packaging, and that are already labelled following the rules of the Hazardous Products Act
- explosives (any explosive as defined by the *Explosives Act*)
- cosmetics, devices, drugs, or food (as defined by the Food and Drug Act)
- pest control products such as pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, etc. (as defined by the *Pest Control Products Act*)
- nuclear substances (as defined by the Nuclear Safety and Control Act) that are radioactive
- wood and products made of wood
- a manufactured article, such as a car battery or a mercury thermometer
- tobacco or products made of tobacco (as defined in the *Tobacco Act*)
- hazardous wastes (a hazardous product sold for recycling or recovery or intended for disposal)

The following acts and regulations apply to WHMIS:

Alberta	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 29
British Columbia	Workers' Compensation Act
	Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Part 5
Manitoba	Workplace Safety and Health Act
	Workplace Safety and Health Regulation, Part 35
New Brunswick	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System Regulation
Newfoundland and Labrador	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) Regulations
Nova Scotia	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) Regulations
Ontario	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)
Prince Edward Island	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System Regulations
Quebec	Act Respecting Occupational Health and Safety
	Hazardous Products Information Regulation
Saskatchewan	The Saskatchewan Employment Act Part III
	Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Part 22
Northwest Territories	Safety Act
	Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations, Part 22
Nunavut	Safety Act
	Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations, Part 22
Yukon Territories	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System Regulation
Federal Sector	Canada Labour Code
	Canadian Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Part X

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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