

CHEMICALS IN THE WORKPLACE

Chemicals can be as harmless as the cleaning products in your department kitchen or as dangerous as acids and corrosives used in the chemistry labs. Chemicals are used every day in the workplace. Some are hazardous and toxic, some are not. Regardless of what they are, all chemicals in a workplace must be handled according to the standards of numerous regulatory

agencies, such as EPA, OSHA, the Department of Environmental Quality, and our own district and campus processes.



Despite their vast difference in levels of harm, they all have something in common: **Safety Data Sheets**

Safety Data Sheets (SDS, formerly MSDS) are required for all chemicals used in the workplace, regardless of how harmful they are or aren't. All employees must have access to the SDS for any chemical (solid, liquid, gas) that they can come into contact with. The SDS has a lot of information, but the main points of interest for users are the name, recommended uses and restrictions for use, health hazards, handling and storage, first aid, and any protective equipment needed for use. Additional information about disposal of waste product and containers are also found on the SDS form for those that manage waste. If you aren't aware of SDS forms for products in your area, contact your supervisor or the Office of Health and Safety (ohs@mesacc.edu). These forms are currently being updated by each department to the new OSHA standards.



When certain chemicals are in use which possess particular health hazards, first aid, fire blankets, eyewashes, and/or drench showers may be required in the areas. Make sure you know where these things are located if you are working with chemicals. Also be familiar with the location of fire extinguishers and fire alarm pull stations in your workspace. (Extinguishers are optional in buildings with overhead sprinklers.) Various departments, along with the Office of Health and Safety, inspect the safety devices and work areas regularly to ensure that all guidelines are being followed and hazards are removed or limited.

YOU can also protect yourself, your coworkers, and our students by ensuring that there is NEVER food or beverage in areas where chemicals are handled or stored. **Follow instructions on all signage...it is only there for your safety!** Always confirm that all containers are properly labeled, capped shut, and that they contain what the label says. Many chemicals, such as those in science labs, require very specific labeling. If there is ever any question or concern about chemicals, ask your supervisor or contact the Office of Health and Safety.

