

Chemical Safety

Information Sheet

November 2010

This information sheet provides a general overview of chemicals and their safety, including what they are and where to find information on the risks associated with exposure to chemicals in the workplace.



What are chemical substances?

A chemical substance is a material with a specific chemical composition. Water is an example of a chemical substance - it always has the same number of hydrogens and oxygen (e.g. H_2O). Some everyday chemicals include cleaning materials, cosmetics, plastics, paint, dyestuffs, sugar, solvents, etc.

A chemical substance can exist as a solid, liquid or gas and still be the same substance. For example, water and steam are different forms of the same substance.

Am I at risk from chemical exposure?

If the chemicals that are used in your workplace are not properly controlled, then it is possible you are being exposed to them. Whether this exposure causes you any harm depends on a combination of factors:

- how hazardous the chemical is;
- how long you are exposed to the chemical (e.g. 5 minutes, 3 hours);
- how often you are exposed (e.g. twice a week/month)

How do I know if a chemical is hazardous?

The container that the chemical is supplied in should have a label that describes the properties of that chemical and should also include instructions on how to use it safely. Labelling is a visual representation of the hazards and the most important and immediate safety information associated with a specific chemical.

As space is limited on a label, additional information can be found in the Safety Data Sheet (SDS); in particular the general health symptoms associated with the identified hazard(s) are in Section 2. An SDS is normally supplied on delivery of the chemical in question, but if you didn't receive one, you are entitled to ask your supplier to provide you with one.



