WHMIS 1988 – Education and Training Fact Sheet



WHAT IS WHMIS EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

Education and training under WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) can be thought of as two separate parts. Education refers to the instruction of workers in general information such as how WHMIS works and the hazards of controlled products. Training refers to the instruction in site-specific information such as work and emergency procedures. Both education and training are an important part of understanding the hazards that may be present at your workplace.

Do I have to be educated and trained in WHMIS?

Yes. All Canadian jurisdictions require that employers develop, implement, and maintain a worker education program that will enable workers to work safely with hazardous chemicals. Instruction on requirements for labels and data sheets, information on how product may affect the workers health or safety as well as training in safe work procedures are necessary. The employer has the general responsibility to provide all hazard information possible either from suppliers, or information the employer is, or ought, to be aware of. This duty is largely accomplished through education and training programs offered on a regular basis.

The specific WHMIS education and training requirements are regulated by each occupational health and safety jurisdiction. You should contact the Labour Branch of Human Resources Development Canada if you work in a federal workplace, or the regulating body in your provincial and territorial jurisdictions to determine the exact nature of their WHMIS requirements. This outline is intended for general information purposes only.

What is the purpose of WHMIS training?

While the specific details of what to teach will vary from workplace to workplace, common objectives for any training program remain the same. The overall goal is to give the workers knowledge and information which they can understand and apply to protect their health and safety every day.

For example: it is not enough for a worker to know that the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) suggests a particular type of respirator for protection against certain product. The worker must know where to get the respirator, locations in the plant where its use is mandatory, how to test it for fit, and where necessary, how to maintain and store it. A successful program gives the worker the ability to use safe procedures with a controlled product and the understanding of why such procedures are necessary.

What, in general, is the content of a WHMIS training program?

Very simply, training typically has two parts:

Education about labels, MSDSs, and other identifiers. This section includes the content of the label and MSDS, as well as the purpose, significance (why a product is called a corrosive, for example), location and modes of identification such as colour, numbers, and abbreviations.

Training in work procedures such as storage, handling, use, disposal, emergencies, and what to do in unusual situations such as fugitive emissions.

Can people in the same plant receive different training?

Instruction is not only based on the information contained in labels and data sheets but also on the conditions in the workplace such as the likelihood of exposure to the product and the corrective measures to be taken. The level of training will depend on the nature of the work.

For example: maintenance persons will require instruction on working with chemicals, various processes and much more. Office workers in the same facility likely only need training in emergency procedures.

What are the criteria of a successful program?

At the end of the education and training program, a worker should have the ability to answer four general questions:

Where can I get hazard information? Workers should demonstrate that they know how to get the information provided by the labels and MSDSs. They should know about the supplier and workplace labels and other ways used to identify the products and what these labels mean. They must also know how to get the MSDS (either by the binder location or by accessing a computer) so that they have a way to obtain information significant to his or her health and safety.

What are the hazards of the controlled product? The worker should be able to read and understand the label and MSDS as well as be aware of any possible harmful effects of the material in question.

How am I protected from those hazards? An understanding of the controls used in the workplace is necessary whether these controls are accomplished by means of the engineering, administration, or by personal protective equipment.

What do I do in the case of an emergency? Understanding the procedures to follow in the event of a spill, release, fire or poisoning involving a controlled product is required. Included in the understanding is the use of personal protective equipment that may be necessary only in the case of emergency.

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