

WHMIS Stats & Facts



DID YOU KNOW?

The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is Canada's national hazard communication standard. The key elements of the system are hazard classification, cautionary labelling of containers, the provision of (material) safety data sheets ((M)SDSs) and worker education and training programs.

WHMIS stands for the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System. It is a comprehensive system for providing health and safety information on hazardous products intended for use, handling, or storage in Canadian workplaces.

WHMIS has aligned with the worldwide hazard communication system known as GHS – the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals. Aligning with GHS provides many benefits, including:

- Hazard classification criteria are more comprehensive which improves ability to indicate severity of hazards.
- New hazard classes are included.
- Physical hazard criteria are consistent with the Transport of Dangerous Goods (TDG regulations).
- Standardized language (hazard and precautionary statements).
- Standardized SDS format and more comprehensive requirements.

Each hazard class contains at least one category, which is assigned a number. Categories may also be called "types," which are assigned an alphabetical letter. In a few cases, subcategories are also specific and identified with a number and a letter.

The category tells you how hazardous a product is:

- Category 1 is always the most hazardous class
- If Category 1 is further divided, Category 1A within the same hazard class will be more hazardous than Category 1B
- Category 2 within the same hazard class is more hazardous than Category 3, and so on

WHMIS, now known as WHMIS 2015, has changed to:

- adopt new international standards for classifying hazardous workplace chemicals and giving information and safety data sheets
- classify hazardous products into two broad hazard groups, physical hazards and health hazards
- update the information on labels to include pictograms, instead of symbols, to

- match hazard classes and make them easier to understand
- update the format of safety data sheets
- update the term “controlled products” to “hazardous products” to be consistent with federal WHMIS legislation
- present information in a consistent manner in all safety data sheets, regardless of supplier
- ensure that the information that workers and emergency responders need most appears first on labels and safety data sheets

Every product classified as a hazardous product under WHMIS 2015 that is found in a workplace must have a safety data sheet (SDS). An SDS tells you:

- The product’s hazards
- How to use the product safely
- What to expect if the recommendations aren’t followed
- How to recognize symptoms of exposure
- What to do if emergencies occur

SDSs are usually written by the manufacturer or supplier of the product. In some circumstances, an employer may be required to prepare an SDS (e.g., when the product is produced and used exclusively in that workplace).

WHMIS stands for Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System and is a set of national standards created by Health Canada to ensure the safety of all Canadians surrounding work hazards, as well as sensitive and chemical substances.

WHMIS is implemented through workplace education programs, training that is now mandatory by law, as well as through key elements such as labeling of containers, providing safety data sheets, and effectively showing that standards are maintained and monitored.

An effective WHMIS helps workers to know the dangers of the job they are doing, and to know what to do in the case of an emergency.

In 2015 a new version of WHMIS was released and a staggered implementation was used to encourage all workplaces to communicate the new system. The deadline for the full application of the 2015 WHMIS is Dec. 1, 2018.

According to the government of Canada, the GHS is an “internationally consistent approach to classifying chemicals and communicating hazard information through labels and safety data sheets,” (Canada.ca). It is the most advanced hazardous materials practices around the world and the standard internationally agreed-upon and managed by the United Nations. When countries trading with Canada, such as the United States and more, align themselves with one set of regulations, safety standards and work conditions improve to the benefit of all.

It is the responsibility of employers to know WHMIS and to ensure it is communicated to their employees. A company’s own individual WHMIS program can be tailored to the needs of their field, but Health Canada requires that certain comprehensive aspects of WHMIS must be communicated. Where you are located within Canada can also impact what is required from different types of employers, according to each province or territory’s agency for workplace safety and health.

Training employees may require knowing exactly what hazardous products are present in the workplace, where they are stored, and how they are used, handled or disposed of. Employees may need to know how to identify hazards and how to keep records on hazardous materials using safety data sheets. Workplaces may need to provide clear procedures for safety at all times and in emergencies.

Measuring the program and ensuring it is always up to date is also important as the amount of health and safety regulation and enforcement is steadily increasing.

Employers may choose to review their WHMIS training program annually, or if workplace conditions or products change.

Legal responsibility rests with employers, but employees can help to share the duty of ensuring WHMIS is responsibly implemented. Participating in WHMIS training may be a requirement of employment and taking necessary steps to protect themselves, coworkers and the general population is an employee's duty to public safety.

An employee's training in WHMIS is generally not transferrable between companies, as each company may be implementing their own communication program. Workplace specific training should be available through your company if you will be directly handling, storing or disposing of hazardous materials.

If you don't see the training readily available to you, then it is appropriate to request it or request how you are expected to obtain it. Often online training can be delivered in a fraction of a workday at a fraction of the cost of other types of training.