

HAZWOPER & Hazardous Chemicals

An area of risk that affects many municipal employees is exposure to hazardous chemicals in the workplace. Almost all employees are exposed to hazardous chemicals, often in forms we do not consider. Consider items like household cleaning chemicals, like Windex or Clorox bleach, printer ink, or copier toner.

An abundance of much more dangerous chemicals is likely present in our municipal Highway and DPW operations, including gasoline, diesel fuel, lubricants, and grease compounds, many of which might be stored in bulk form of 55 gallons or greater. For these exposures, it is vital and required by state regulations to have proper safety protections for employees.

Three requirements for the use and storage of hazardous chemicals in the workplace are:

1. Properly labeled hazardous chemical containers.
 - a. Generic spray bottles should not be present in the workplace.
 - b. Labels contain pictograms, signal words, and hazard statements.
2. Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for all hazardous chemicals used in the workplace.
 - a. This replaces the previous MSDS.
 - b. It must be kept in a binder or file, available for all staff to access.
 - c. More relevant sections of the SDS for municipal staff are, 4: First Aid Measures, 7: Handling and Storage, and 8: Personal Protective Equipment.
3. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and emergency equipment, applicable to these chemicals.
 - a. Review Part 8 of the SDS when new chemicals are delivered to see if any special PPE is necessary for the safe handling of this chemical, and be sure staff is alerted to all PPE requirements. Ensure PPE is available for staff at any time.

HAZWOPER awareness deals with the potential of an emergency release of a hazardous material either at the municipal facility (garage, sewer plant, water plant, etc.) or in the field (on the road, i.e. a motor vehicle accident). The SDS addresses the cleanup and firefighting measures for chemical spills involving municipal operations and vehicles. Review these sections of the SDS for all bulk-storage hazardous chemicals stored and transported by your municipal operations. Additionally, ensure proper cleanup and firefighting equipment is available.

- Part 5: Firefighting Measures
- Part 6: Accidental Release Measures
- Part 13: Disposal Considerations

For over-the-road, non-owned spills, the best course of action is to stay away from the site until it is confirmed that the chemical spill does not pose any harmful health effects. Staff in these departments should attend annual HAZWOPER Awareness training to understand the precautions necessary during chemical spills, including:

1. Types of chemical states and their spill potential
 - a. Solids can result in spills and fires, usually with minimal travel.
 - b. Liquids can result in leaks and fires, likely to travel downgrade.
 - c. Gases can result in leaks and fires, likely to travel in wind direction.
2. What safety placards tell us
3. The U.N. number on the safety placard
4. How to use the US DOT Emergency Response Guide

Chemical spills can create harmful conditions in municipal facilities and over the road, exposing employees to great health risks. Chemical exposures used in municipal operations are easier to manage when they are properly labeled and have a maintained SDS. For those occurring in the field, understanding transportation labeling can help keep employees safe.

For further information on the safe use of and interaction with chemicals, please contact the Comp Alliance Director of Loss Control, Robert Blaisdell, at rblaisdell@wrightinsurance.com.