

Chemical Safety Culture

Annually, staff attend Right-to-Know training on the safe handling and storage of hazardous chemicals in the workplace. Whether at the highway garage, DPW site, water or sewer plants, or municipal center, proper handling of chemicals is vital for employee safety, as some chemical exposures have resulted in explosions, serious injuries, and fatalities.

If your chemical management program solely consists of maintaining a book of potentially outdated Safety Data Sheets and completing annual training, you're missing the value of your chemical data. Your safety officers recognize that maintaining a list of chemicals present at work is just a starting point. Use this opportunity to understand why they remain in use, how much is consumed and stored, where they present the greatest personal and property risk, and when substitution or removal might be advantageous.

This month, make it a priority to review your Right-to-Know program:

- Confirm you have a complete chemical inventory at each applicable location.
- Confirm that proper chemical labeling is in place (Globally Harmonized System).
- Document any bulk storage of chemicals measuring 55 gallons or more, along with their locations.
- Review Safety Data Sheets to identify chemical spill response (Section 6), Personal Protective Equipment (Section 8), and fire-fighting measures (Section 5). Consider discussions on local fire response (Section 5).
- Identify chemical use, consumption rates, and replacement methods.
- Review excess supply disposal considerations (Section 13 of SDS). Confirm that chemicals are properly and safely disposed of.

At the conclusion of this review process, consider minimizing exposures through:

- Reduction: Can you decrease chemical supplies while remaining effective?
- Substitution: Are safer chemicals with fewer health or physical hazards available?
- Elimination: Are outdated chemicals still being stored on-site that can be removed?

Then, implement real-time tracking to create live inventories, leading to improved knowledge and controls.

As staff complete their annual Right-to-Know training, take the time to review and improve your chemical management system across all facilities. A proactive approach not only reduces injuries but also results in cost savings and improved morale.