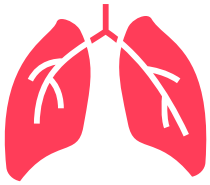
Using safety data sheets

Identifying hazards that can cause

OCCUPATIONAL LUNG DISEASES



Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require you, as the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), to eliminate or minimise risks to the health and safety of workers as much as you reasonably can.

Safety data sheets (SDS) are a useful tool to identify, understand and manage the risks of hazardous chemicals in your workplace. This includes hazards that may put workers at risk of developing an occupational lung disease.

You can get an SDS from the manufacturer, importer or supplier of a hazardous chemical or product and you must make SDS readily accessible to anyone using the chemical or product at work.

This information sheet will help you understand how to read a SDS.

Sections of a safety data sheet

You should read and understand all the different sections of a SDS. However, sections 2, 3, 7, 8 and 11 of the SDS will help you identify hazards in the air that can lead to occupational lung diseases.

Section 2 – Hazard classification

This section describes the hazard of the chemical and the warning information for the hazard.

Hazard categories and statements

Some Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) categories indicate health hazards, such as respiratory hazards.

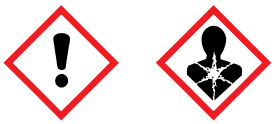


Figure 1 – Relevant GHS pictograms

Most GHS hazard categories will have a hazard statement that provides a brief description of the hazard. You should give special attention to chemicals that have hazard statements that contain key words, such as 'inhaled', 'inhalation' or 'lungs.'

Some SDS may also include these GHS hazard pictograms.

- the GHS health hazard pictogram (represents chronic health hazards)
- the GHS exclamation mark pictogram (represents low level toxicity).

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Precautionary statements

Precautionary statements describe the recommended measures you can take to reduce or avoid harmful effects caused by exposure to a hazardous chemical. Most hazard categories will have precautionary statements, including the health hazard categories.

'Prevention precautionary statements' are the most helpful as they provide instructions to prevent worker exposure. 'Response precautionary statements' provide instructions on what to do in the case of accidental exposure.

A full list of precautionary statements can be found in Appendix D of the Model Code of Practice: Labelling of workplace hazardous chemicals.

Section 3 – Composition and information on ingredients

This section provides information on the components or ingredients of the hazardous chemical or substance that are hazardous themselves and/or have a workplace exposure standard.

This information is important if the components or ingredients are released into the air when it is used or modified.

Section 7 – Handling and storage

This section is about the safe handling and storage practices you should use to prevent unwanted release of and exposure to the hazardous chemical.

You should ensure you and your workers are familiar with this part of the SDS to understand how to safely conduct work and handle the hazardous chemical to avoid harming themselves or others.

More information on how to achieve this can be found in Section 8 of the SDS, exposure controls and personal protection.

Section 8 – Exposure controls and personal protection

This section outlines the control measures you should implement to minimise exposure to hazardous chemicals.

A workplace exposure standard represents the airborne concentration of an hazardous chemical or mixture that must not be exceeded. As a PCBU, you hold the duty to ensure that a workplace exposure standard is not exceeded. You should implement the most suitable control measures (usually this is a combination of control measures) and, where there is a residual risk, also provide workers with the personal protective equipment (PPE) suggested in this section of the SDS.

Your workers should be familiar with this section and you as the PCBU must provide them with training to ensure they understand how to use all the control measures that are in place for the hazardous chemical.

Section 11 – Toxicological information

This section provides the toxicological information that is related to the chemical's health hazard categories. The information in this section includes acute and chronic health effects relating to exposure to the hazardous chemical.

You should keep an eye out for information in the following categories in particular:

Information on possible routes of exposure

The most relevant route of exposure (how it gets into the body) for hazards in the air is through inhalation (breathing it in). However, other routes, such as through ingestion (swallowing) and dermal (through your skin), can also be important.

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Information about early onset symptoms from exposure

This information describes the first symptoms you might see or feel at the lowest exposure, through to symptoms caused by severe exposure.

Information about any delayed health effects from exposure

This information describes any delayed effects that could be expected after short- or long-term exposures. This information is especially important for occupational lung diseases because many have a long time period between exposure and symptoms or ill-health.

For more information about SDS, go to Safe Work Australia's web page on SDS.

For more information and resources on occupational lung diseases, go to swa.gov.au/clearlungs or contact your WHS regulator.