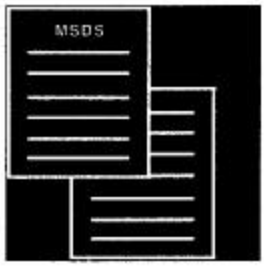
CHEMICAL
SAFETY

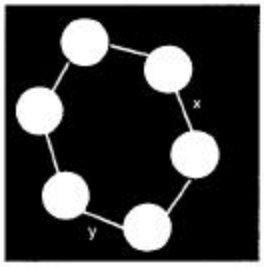
Beyond the "Right to Know"



The material safety data sheet—MSDS. You've seen it, and you know it tells everything you need to know about the hazardous chemical you are working with—and probably more. Can you sort through all that technical information and zero in on what's important for you to know? Asking the right questions can help you get the information you need to work safely with each hazardous chemical. Here are some questions the MSDS can answer.

Sections 1-2 What Is It?

Find out what the chemical is, who makes it, what's in it and how much of each component there is. The MSDS includes common names for the chemical and names of substances in the chemical that may be dangerous. It will list the severity of the chemical's hazard.



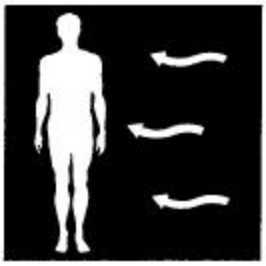
Section 3 What's It Like?

The chemical's physical characteristics can help you know what to expect from it. Some chemicals become hazardous when they evaporate, especially if they are flammable or harmful to breathe. The vapor pressure tells how easily the chemical vaporizes; the higher the vapor pressure, the more likely you are to inhale it. Vapor density indicates how heavy the vapor is; if heavier than air, it will accumulate in low places. Other qualities—solubility in water, appearance, odor, reactivity with water, and specific gravity (whether the chemical floats or sinks in water)—can help you understand where the chemical is likely to be concentrated in the working environment.

Sections 4-5 What Other Dangers Are There?

Is the chemical hazardous when mixed with other substances or exposed to air or water? Is it combustible? Flammable? Explosive? To avoid improper handling that could lead to a fire or explosion, you need to know the flash point—the lowest temperature at which the chemical's vapor will ignite in the presence of a spark or fire—and the auto-ignition temperature—the temperature at which the chemical will ignite without a spark.

Section 6 Can It Harm Me?



Find out what health hazards can result from exposure. What are the symptoms and treatments? How can the chemical can enter your body—through the skin, by breathing, by swallowing? What type of hazard is it—is it cancer-causing, an irritant? What emergency first aid should be sought?

Section 7-6 How Do I Protect Myself?

Find out what protective clothing and equipment to wear and how to handle the substance safely. If you are storing or transporting the substance, what special precautions must you take? The MSDS contains a bewildering amount of data, some of it extremely technical. By knowing what questions to ask when reading the MSDS, you can more quickly find the most important information.