

NYS Unified Court System
“Right to Know Law”
(Exposure Control)

The Civil Court building. The Harlem Court building. All of New York State’s Halls of Justice. Beyond the bricks and mortar. Beyond the lawyers, plaintiffs and defendants. Beyond the judges and jurors. They all remain everyday workplaces for you; the employees. And, as in any other workplace, there are toxic and hazardous substances, (gaseous, liquid or solid) stored in the workplace that may be dangerous to your safety and health. For that reason, this program was created to ensure that the Unified Court System and all of the facilities statewide are in compliance with the regulations under New York State’s “Right to Know Law”. The “Right to Know Law” states that all employers must inform employees of health effects and hazards of toxic substances at the workplace. This program is designed to inform you of the possible dangers in dealing with hazardous chemicals, and the measures you can take in order to protect yourself.

What are toxic or hazardous substances?

They’re any chemical substance or mixture of a chemical substance in a liquid, gaseous, or solid state, which is manufactured, processed, used or stored at the workplace. You may not realize it, but you come in contact with chemicals everyday in a variety of ways. In fact, often you come across toxic chemicals. Even shopping at the supermarket. While stopping for gas at your local station. In fact, chemicals are part of our everyday lives. This is equally true in our courts:

- Officer Lampert comes in contact with explosives, lead and other hazardous chemicals.
- Mr. Lopez, who is the supply clerk, handles toner, alcohol and other toxic substances.
- Ms. Rosa, a custodian, may use as many as fifteen different toxic cleaners on any given day.
- Mr. Franks, the court clerk, doesn’t think he works with chemicals. However, even he on occasion comes in contact with toxic chemicals.

In order to ensure your safety in your workplace, the Office of Court Administration has designated facility coordinators at every work-site. The name of your facility coordinator is located at the bottom of the “Right to Know Law” bulletin. This may be found posted on your employee bulletin board or in a similar convenient place.

Training

Your facility coordinator is responsible for the following information:

- Your facility coordinator has developed an open communication plan to help employees understand minimum standards to protect themselves from exposure to toxic or hazardous substances.

- The key to any program is communication, so you too must do your part. Please do not hesitate to notify your coordinator of any hazardous situations, or if there is something you do not understand.

List of Hazardous Chemicals

Your facility coordinator maintains access to a list of all hazardous chemicals used routinely at your workplace. This list is updated regularly upon receipt of any additional chemicals. Your facility coordinator also maintains access to the material safety data sheets.

What is Material Safety Data Sheet? (MSDS)

A material safety data sheet, found in the original packing box, offers information and facts regarding each chemical. Material safety data sheets, otherwise known as MSDS, contain the following information:

- **Product Information** includes the name of the chemical and the manufacturer.
- **Ingredients** with the acceptable exposure limits.
- **Physical Data** such as evaporation rates and boiling points.
- **Fire and Explosive Hazards** of the chemicals and materials listed.

The MSDS also contains the following:

- **Reactivity/Stability Data:** This explains the potential hazards that could occur when chemicals are mixed or if they come in contact with other material.
- **Health Hazards:** This section explains the health risks associated with exposure to the product.
- **Safe Handling Directions:** For example, what actions to take in the case of a spill or leak.
- **Protective Equipment:** This section suggests protective gear, such as: goggles, gloves, or any other special equipment that may be needed for handling chemicals.

Substances used improperly may be dangerous to your health. It is strongly advised that you read directions and labels in order to ensure safe handling of all chemicals and substances.

Labels

In addition to the MSDS information, the user cannot forget the importance of labels. The label is the quickest and most successful way to obtain information. Each manufacturer is required to label products with hazardous information.

Never remove these labels!

Exposure to Chemicals Can Harm You

It is therefore important to be aware of the ways in which chemical substances can enter the body.

There are four main ways:

- **Inhalation:** Sometimes simply breathing toxic chemicals inadvertently can cause an effect.
- **Absorption:** This occurs through mucous membranes in the body such as those located around your eyes.

- **Direct Contact:** This can occur either directly through the skin or through open cuts and abrasions.
- **Ingestion:** These chemicals can also be ingested. Passed from dirty hands to the food we eat, or entrapped in drinks left opened in chemical areas.

So, again, remember the rules:

- Avoid ingesting chemicals.
- Wash your hands.
- Wear protective equipment.

Effects of Chemical Substances

Chemical substances can affect us in two general ways:

- **Acute Effects:** They can have an immediate effect on you if you're exposed to enough of the chemical.
- **Chronic Effects:** This can result after repeated long-term exposure to a chemical.

Procedures to Protect you from Chemical Exposure

- **Training and Education:** This informs you of the possible hazards, as well as, the procedures required to protect yourself.
- **Dust Fumes and Corrosives:** Proper maintenance and ventilation control the buildup of fumes, dust and gases. Your facility coordinator continuously monitors to ensure that your workplace is maintained and inspected on a regular basis.

We hope that this program has enhanced your understanding of the potential dangers when dealing with chemicals. The "Right to Know Law" was put into effect to ensure employee rights are protected. The New York State Unified Court System is dedicated to ensuring the workplace is the safest it can possibly be for its thousands of employees. Together we can maintain safe practices and work towards a safer and healthier environment for all.