

If you use chemicals at work this leaflet is for you.

It explains how to find out more about the chemicals you use just by reading their labels. There's more information on labels than you might think.



CORROSIVE



DANGEROUS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



EXPLOSIVE



(VERY) TOXIC



HARMFUL/IRRITANT



OXIDISING



HIGHLY OR EXTREMELY FLAMMABLE

#### Other publications

More information about suppliers' responsibilities to classify, label and package chemicals properly under the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2002 (CHIP 3) can be found in the HSE free leaflet *The idiot's guide to CHIP* INDG350 (also available in priced packs ISBN 0 7176 2333 5).

HSE also publish a free leaflet on safety data sheets entitled *Why do I need a safety data sheet?* INDG353 (also available in priced packs ISBN 0 7176 2367 X).

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This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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**READ  
THE  
LABEL**

*How to find out  
if chemicals  
are dangerous*





## CHEMICALS

A chemical is not just something used by scientists in laboratories. Most people use chemicals as part of their job or at home every day. Cleaning products such as bleach and oven sprays are chemicals. So are paints, inks, glues, and oils.

Most of the chemicals you might use at work are not dangerous if you use them properly and know what to do if something goes wrong (such as spillage). But some chemicals need more careful handling than others. Labels can help you identify the more hazardous chemicals, tell you what the dangers are, and how to avoid them.

## SO WHAT CAN A LABEL TELL ME ?

A label can tell you a lot. Let's take a look at a typical label (below) you might find on a chemical used in the workplace. You will see that it gives basic information which alerts you to the dangers and precautions, and gives details about the supplier so you can get further advice. Look for the label on all the chemicals you use.

## WHAT USE IS THIS INFORMATION ?

As well as helping users the information on the label helps employers identify dangerous chemicals and undertake risk assessments under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH). By law, suppliers of chemicals are required to label their products with hazard symbols, warnings and safety advice if a chemical is dangerous; managers in workplaces where chemicals are kept or used must ensure that the chemicals are used safely. For more information see the leaflet *COSHH: a brief guide to the Regulations* INDG136 (rev 2) (single copies available free, also available in priced packs ISBN 0 7176 2677 6).

## FURTHER SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS

Manufacturers may also include 'instructions for use' either on the label, or on a leaflet supplied with the product. Suppliers must provide safety data sheets for dangerous chemicals used in the workplace. This is a detailed information sheet provided by chemical suppliers to their customers so that workers and the environment can be properly protected. It is not confidential and employees and their representatives should be provided with copies on request. If a safety data sheet isn't provided

with the chemical, your employer should ask the supplier to provide one. Someone in your company should receive a safety data sheet for each of the dangerous chemicals the company uses. Safety data sheets provide more technical and detailed information about the chemical and more information about how to use it safely and how to deal with emergencies.

## I WANT TO KNOW MORE

If you work with dangerous chemicals and you want more information, you should ask about your employer's risk assessment and its conclusions about the risks in your workplace and what precautions should be taken. Or, if you need to know more about a particular dangerous chemical, you could ask for the safety data sheet. Safety data sheets can be used by your employer to do a COSHH Essentials risk assessment which advises your employer on the right way to protect your health from hazardous substances. Your employer can do a free COSHH Essentials risk assessment through the Internet either via [www.hsedirect.com](http://www.hsedirect.com) or directly on [www.coshh-essentials.org.uk](http://www.coshh-essentials.org.uk).

### HAZARD SYMBOL

These are always black on orange. They alert you to the main dangers posed by the chemical. Other symbols you might expect to see are illustrated overleaf. Not all labels will have symbols, but all will contain the brief list of warnings and safety advice

# Glutaraldehyde



**Toxic**



**Dangerous for the environment**

Toxic by inhalation and if swallowed  
Causes burns

May cause sensitisation by inhalation and by skin contact

Very toxic to aquatic organisms

Keep locked up and out of the reach of children

In case of contact with eyes, rinse immediately with plenty of water and seek medical advice

Wear suitable protective clothing, gloves and eye/face protection

In case of accident or if you feel unwell seek medical advice immediately (show the label where possible)

Avoid release to the environment. Refer to special instructions/safety data sheet

EC label 203-856-5

Supplied by:  
Name, address and telephone number of supplier

### WARNINGS AND SAFETY ADVICE

The label also contains a brief list of warnings and safety advice. The law requires suppliers of chemicals to tell you what hazards a chemical might pose and how to use it safely. The information is brief but important. If it advises you to avoid contact with skin then you should do just that. The advice is on the label for your safety.

Further information on the law on labelling and chemical hazard classification is also available on the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) CHIP website: [www.hse.gov.uk/chip/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/chip/index.htm).

### Safety representatives

If you have any questions about safety precautions for dangerous chemicals, ask your employer first. If there is a safety representative or representative of employee safety in your workplace you may find it useful to talk over any concerns that you still have.

Most people think that accidents only ever happen to somebody else. Until they happen to you. For your own safety and the safety of those you work with, each time you use a chemical, pause for a moment and

## READ THE LABEL.

