



ALMOST EVERY JOB involves some exposure to chemicals. Chemicals in the workplace come in many products: cleaners, pesticides, and many other products that are used every day.

If you are concerned about the chemicals you work with, there are several things to do to make sure your health is protected.

GETTING INFORMATION

The first thing to do is to get information about the chemicals you work with. It's important to find out a few key pieces of information:

- What chemicals are in the products?
- What health effects can these chemicals cause?
- How much of this stuff am I exposed to?
- What is the best way to avoid exposure to these chemicals?
- What is my employer doing to make sure I don't get overexposed?

WHAT CHEMICALS ARE IN THE PRODUCTS?

It is your employer's legal responsibility to know what chemicals you work with and to give you information about those chemicals.

New York State Right to Know Law requires that your employer has information available to you if you request it about the chemicals you work with. In addition, under this law, your employer must give you training every year about the chemicals on your job.

The Hazard Communication Standard is a second law that requires your employer to give you information and training about the chemicals used on your job.

The three main ways of getting this information are:

Labels: Each product must have a label for you to read. The label must include information on what the product is and what company makes that product. The label must also include warnings about what health problems the chemicals can cause.

Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) are fact sheets that the chemical company produces with a lot of information on the health effects of the product. Your employer must have these available for you to read. The bad part about MSDSs is that they are often confusing to read and hard to understand. If you have questions about an MSDSs, call your union for help in figuring out what the technical language means.

Training: For public sector workers in New York State, your employer is required to give you training once per year on the health effects of any chemicals that you use. If they buy a new product for you to use, they must train you how to properly use the product and about any hazards there may be associated with the product.



HOW CAN I BE PROTECTED FROM DANGEROUS CHEMICALS?

Once you have answers about how dangerous a chemical is, and how much you're exposed to, you need to evaluate whether you are being properly protected from exposure. **There are several common ways to reduce exposure to chemicals.**

SUBSTITUTION: The best way to protect yourself from a dangerous chemical is to stop using that chemical. Often it is possible to find a safer substitute for the dangerous chemical. For example, some cleaning products contain very dangerous chemicals. It may be possible to find cleaning products that are safer.



Enclose or Isolate the Job: If you can't find a safer substitute, another way to protect yourself and others from the chemical is to isolate or enclose the process. An example of this is a "spray booth" for painting. Many locations have a special room or booth for painting. By keeping the painting process isolated in its own booth, you can prevent exposure to others in the area.

Ventilation: If you can't get rid of the chemical or isolate it, the next best thing is to use good ventilation. Some chemicals require "general dilution ventilation." General dilution ventilation is when you have lots of air going through the workplace. Some chemicals require "local exhaust ventilation." Local exhaust ventilation is when you have a hood and duct work over the chemical. It sucks up the chemical and gets it out of your breathing zone before you can breathe it in.



Work Rules: There are some work rules that can help keep chemical exposures low. Housekeeping rules (such as storing chemicals properly, cleaning up spills right away, and throwing chemicals away properly) can all help reduce the risk of getting sick.

Often there are supplies that you need in order to keep chemicals off of you. Some of these are soap and water to wash with; a separate room for eating and food storage; a work uniform; a place to change and store street clothes; and a place to wash contaminated clothes without bringing them home to your family.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is the last line of

defense and should only be used when other measures are not providing enough protection. PPE to protect yourself from chemical exposure includes:

- Respirators/face masks
- Gloves
- Aprons
- Face shield
- Goggles
- Boots

PESH

WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES

According to the PESH law, employers must use Personal Protective Equipment as a last resort — only after other methods have been tried and more protection is still needed.

Many chemicals are regulated by the Public Employees Safety and Health (PESH) law, but many are not. To find out about whether a specific chemical you are concerned about has a "legal limit", call the union. The PESH standard regulating specific chemicals is 1910 Subpart Z and 1910.1001 – 1910.1052.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is regulated by PESH. The PPE standards are: 1910.132 – 1910.138.

Other PESH standards may apply in particular situations.

