

HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

– THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAM



Each year in New Zealand an estimated 600-900 workers die and 30,000 suffer serious ill health from work-related disease - and hazardous substances are a major contributor.

If your organisation is among the one in three New Zealand businesses that manufactures, uses, handles or stores hazardous substances, protecting your team will be a top priority. Often though, it's hard to navigate your way through the latest requirements, rules and regulations, and harder still to understand how they pertain to your particular business.

The good news is, there are resources and training courses available to assist you in making sure you not only know what's expected of you, but also have the tools and know-how to keep your people and workplace safe.

So, what exactly is required of you as an employer under the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations? Regulation 4.5 is key, as it outlines the obligations you have to ensure your workers have the knowledge and practical experience to work safely around hazardous substances.

Firstly, employers have a duty to provide information, training and instruction to every worker who uses, handles, manufactures or stores hazardous substances. This must be given before they carry out or supervise any work.

Staff must have access to reference material and safety data sheets that clearly outline the hazardous substances in their workplace, and how they are to be handled and stored safely. They must also be trained in the physicochemical and health hazards associated with these substances, and the correct procedures for their safe use, handling, manufacture, storage and disposal, including any necessary personal protective equipment.

Workers need to know what their obligations are and what they need to do in an emergency. And they need to practice it under direct supervision in the workplace.

Then there's the record keeping! Businesses need to keep a record of all the training and instruction given to each worker, and that record has to be available for inspection at any time by an inspector or compliance certifier.

But what if your worker has previous experience or training that means they already meet the above criteria? So long as you have the documentation or certification to back it up, you won't need to provide this training and instruction, unless of course you think a refresher is called for. That said, if the worker is new to the workplace, you'll still need to give them a site-specific induction and appropriate supervision.

Not surprisingly, the ramifications of not meeting the requirements, rules and regulations are far reaching. Exposure to workplace chemicals can lead to short and long-term health issues, from minor skin rashes, to poisoning and serious disorders of the kidney, liver and lungs. Your people are your greatest assets, and first and foremost, you need to protect them.

There are also financial consequences for contravening regulations. Failure to give your workers the required information, training and instruction – or failure to keep your records up to scratch – could see your business hit with a hefty fine.

Find out more about Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations here: <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2017/0131/latest/DLM7309401.html>