

WEEK 8 FEBRUARY • ~5 MIN READ • ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

# WHMIS & Hazardous Materials Refresher

That pail of sealer, the drum of solvent, the bag of cement — they all carry chemical hazards. WHMIS is how we know what's in them. But knowing what's in it is the first step, not the whole answer: the label and the data sheet tell you what the hazard is, and your employer's assessment of *this task* is what decides the controls.

## The hazard

Construction chemicals burn skin, damage lungs, catch fire, or do harm that shows up years later. Plenty of them look harmless. WHMIS is more than labels and a binder — it includes the education and training you're entitled to for the products you actually work with, so you can read a label, find a data sheet, and understand what it means for the job in front of you.

## What to do

- ▶ **Read the label before you open anything.** Pictograms, signal word, hazard statements, precautions. If you can't identify it, don't use it.
- ▶ **Know where the safety data sheets are and how to pull the one you need,** before you need it — not while someone is rinsing their eye.
- ▶ **Understand where the SDS stops.** It tells you the hazards and what kind of protection is appropriate. It does **not** set your controls. The employer looks at this task, this exposure, and this space, and works down the hierarchy: substitute something safer, ventilate or enclose it, change the work method — and PPE last, once the rest has done what it can.
- ▶ **A respirator is never something you just pick up because a data sheet mentions one.** It comes through the employer's respiratory program: the right selection for that contaminant, medical clearance, training, fit testing, and a change schedule. No program, no respirator — the answer is a different control.
- ▶ **Decanting has rules.** If you pour product into another container, it needs a workplace label. There are narrow exceptions where you fill it from a properly labelled supply and use it yourself immediately, or keep it under your own control for that shift **with the contents clearly identified on it** — but it never travels, never gets left, and never gets handed to someone else unlabelled.
- ▶ Use products only as labelled, never mix unless the instructions say it's safe, and keep containers closed and away from heat and ignition sources.
- ▶ Know the first-aid and spill steps for what you're using **before** you start, including where the eyewash is.

## Watch out for

- ▶ Unlabelled or wrongly labelled containers. Don't guess, don't sniff it, don't use it.
- ▶ Product split into a shop jug with no workplace label and left on the bench.
- ▶ Solvents, dust, or fumes in a tight, poorly ventilated winter space — the enclosure that's keeping the heat in is keeping the vapour in too.
- ▶ Reaching for a mask to get through a job that should be ventilated or done a different way.

## Talk it over

- ▶ Can everyone here find the data sheet for the product they'll open today, in about a minute?
- ▶ Which product on this site worries you most — and has anyone actually assessed the task, or are we going on the label alone?



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