



Mark Those Containers

OSHA standards (under the HazCom law) require all jobsite containers to be clearly marked/labeled as to their specific contents. Manufacturers, importers, and distributors must label all containers of hazardous chemicals.

In the **OSHA Hazardous Communication Standard (Right-to-Know Law)**, it stipulates that all containers must be clearly marked as to their contents.

The **primary purpose of this guideline** is to ensure that all containers are labeled, and if the label comes off then the contractor is obliged to mark the primary content (for example: GASOLINE, KEROSENE, HYDRAULIC FLUID, SOLVENT, MASTIC, etc.).

The **biggest offender of this OSHA** requirement is the typical 5-gallon gas can. Almost every jobsite has at least one gas can, and in far too many cases the word "gasoline" has peeled off the container, leaving it "unlabeled." OSHA says that the can, then, must be re-labeled, and bear the inscription: GASOLINE. OSHA further stipulates that it must be "clearly marked as to its contents," meaning that a crayon marking, or an aerosol can, does not qualify under the definition of "clearly marked."

Under this same **Hazardous Communication Standard**, it states that all containers must have some type of lid/top/closure apparatus to keep the contents from spilling or leaking out. If a container is not properly sealed with an air-tight cover, then the caustic contents can seep out and workers can be exposed to the chemicals.

Even if the container is clearly marked as to its contents, and the cover is on tight, **this same OSHA standard provides guidelines for proper "storage"** of containers with chemical contents. Because many chemicals have a low threshold for explosion, such chemicals must be stored in an area where they will not be subject to open flames, or heat-producing equipment (steam turbines, auto/truck engines, propane tanks, welding torches, generators, etc.).

Note, too, that when personal protective equipment (such as dust masks, air purifying respirators, lanyards, safety glasses, safety vests, etc.) are exposed to caustic/chemical agents, this contamination can spread to the user. Therefore, housekeeping is important to prevent worker exposure to such hazards.

Employers should check all containers when they arrive to make sure they're labeled. The original labels must stay on the containers and be readable as long as the containers are used (on the jobsite, in trucks and vehicles, in storage, etc.). Here is a short list of what is on a typical label:

- Identity of chemical
- Name and address of manufacturer
- Storage and handling procedures
- Protective clothing recommendations
- Phone number of manufacturer

Many labels/containers are color coded with universally recognized colors, such as:

- **White**--Personal Protection (goggles, gloves, masks, etc.)
- **Blue**--Health Hazard (possibility of injury)
- **Red**--Flammability (possibility of ignition)
- **Yellow**--Reactivity (possibility of reaction)

OSHA's Hazardous Communication Standard (Right-to-Know Law) is for your protection. Be familiar with the guidelines outlined in this Safety Talk series, and be sure to ask your supervisors about those areas that are unclear. Your health and welfare is of prime importance to your employer, your supervisor, and your co-workers.