

HEALTH AND SAFETY FACT SHEET

WORKPLACE HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INFORMATION SYSTEM



What is the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), and why was it created?

The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is Canada's national hazard information and communication standard. It ensures consistency in how information about harmful materials is provided to workers in Canada's workplaces.

Is WHMIS a law?

Yes. WHMIS became law through a combination of federal, provincial and territorial legislation and came into force on October 31, 1988.

A complete list of the laws and regulations related to WHMIS can be found at the end of this document.

What is WHMIS 2015?

In February 2015, WHMIS was modified to comply with the Globally Harmonized System for Classification Labels (GHS). GHS applies a global system of classifying and labelling chemicals and communicating their hazards. The updated version of WHMIS is called WHMIS 2015.

The most significant differences between WHMIS 1988 and WHMIS 2015 are:

- Hazardous materials are now divided into **three groups (physical, health, and environmental hazards)**. NOTE: The **environmental hazard** group may be listed on a safety data sheet and product label. However, this group is not a WHMIS requirement for workplaces in Canada.

- Each hazard group includes several **classes** (19 classes in the physical hazards group and 12 classes in the health hazard group). Each class contains **categories** and can include **subcategories**.
- Product labels (also called supplier labels) include new **pictograms** for hazard classes, prescribed **hazard statements**, and **signal words** (words that alert workers about the degree or level of hazard).
- **Safety data sheets (SDS)** now have 16 sections with required information.
- Employers no longer have to update a **safety data sheet** every three years. Updated **safety data sheets** are now only required when new information about a product becomes available.

Can chemical manufacturers and importers still use WHMIS 1988 product labels? Can employers still keep products with WHMIS 1988 labels and safety data sheets in the workplace?

No. A three-year transition period was adopted to allow manufacturers, importers, distributors, and suppliers of workplace hazardous materials to change the classification and labelling of products. By the end of this three-year period, employers were required to remove products with WHMIS 1988 labels and safety data sheets.

The three-year transition period ended on December 1, 2018. As such, there should be no products in the workplace with WHMIS 1988 labels and safety data sheets.

Which hazardous materials are grouped under physical hazards and health hazards?

PHYSICAL HAZARDS	HEALTH HAZARDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flammable gases • Flammable aerosols • Flammable liquids • Flammable solids • Oxidizing liquids • Oxidizing solids • Organic peroxides • Oxidizing gases • Gases under pressure • Self-reactive substances and mixtures • Pyrophoric liquids • Pyrophoric solids • Pyrophoric gases • Self-heating substances and mixtures • Substances and mixtures which, in contact with water, emit flammable gases • Corrosive to metals • Combustible dusts • Simple asphyxiants • Physical hazards not otherwise classified <p>Classification and definitions of these hazards can be found in Part 7 of the federal Hazardous Products Regulations</p>	<p>ACUTE TOXICITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin corrosion/irritation • Serious eye damage/eye Irritation • Respiratory or skin sensitization • Germ cell mutagenicity • Carcinogenicity • Reproductive toxicity • Specific target organ toxicity — single exposure • Specific target organ toxicity — repeated exposure • Aspiration hazard • Biohazardous infectious materials • Health hazards not otherwise classified <p>Classification and definitions of these hazards can be found in Part 8 of the federal Hazardous Products Regulations</p>

How should information on hazardous materials be provided?

There are three ways to provide information on hazardous materials: labels, safety data sheets, and worker education.

1. Product labels (supplier labels)

Suppliers are required to provide cautionary labels on all hazardous products as a condition of sale and import into Canada. With a few exceptions, the minimum content required on a supplier label is:

- **Product identifier** – e.g., the brand name of the product
- **Initial supplier identifier** – name, address, and telephone number of the supplier
- **Pictogram(s)** – Black symbol on a white background framed by a red square set on one of its points (like a diamond). The black symbol is determined by the hazard classification. Exception: The pictogram for biohazardous infectious materials is a black symbol on a white background outlined by a black circle.
- **Signal word** – The words “danger” or “warning” to emphasize the hazards,
- **Hazard statement(s)** – A brief statement that describes the nature of the hazard of the product.

EXAMPLES:

- Fatal if swallowed.
 - Causes skin irritation.
 - Highly flammable liquid.
- **Precautionary measures** – A brief phrase that describes the manufacturer’s recommended measures to prevent harm from exposure to or improper handling of the product.

EXAMPLES:

- Wear protective gloves.
- Store in a well-ventilated place.
- Dispose of contents in accordance with local regulations.
- IF SWALLOWED: Immediately call a POISON CENTRE or doctor. Rinse mouth.

Supplemental label information – Further detail on the product, as long as that information does not contradict the standardized hazard information.

2. Safety data sheet (SDS)

A safety data sheet (SDS) is a document prepared by the supplier or manufacturer containing information on:

- the hazardous material (ingredients, known toxicological properties)
- the potential hazards (health, fire, reactivity and environmental)
- how to work safely with the hazardous material (PPE, handling, storage, disposal)
- the steps to take in case of an accident (first aid, fire-fighting).

In Canada, safety data sheets must be produced in French and English by the supplier. There are 16 sections on an SDS. Under Canadian legislation, the requirements to include information under the section headings 12 - Ecological information, 13 - Disposal considerations, 14 - Transport information, and 15 - Regulatory information are optional.

A copy of the SDS should be stored with the accompanying hazardous material for all hazardous products in the workplace. It is also a good idea to file a copy of all safety data sheets in a binder kept in a central area accessible by all workers.

Although safety data sheets do not expire, they must be kept up to date and replaced when the supplier becomes aware of significant new data. Significant new data means new information that:

- changes a product's classification in a category or subcategory of a hazard class,
- result in a product being placed in another hazard class, or
- change the ways to protect against the hazards presented by the product.

3. Worker education

Any workers who may be exposed to hazardous materials have a right to know about the dangers of working with or near these materials. Under WHMIS, the worker's right to know is delivered through information and training.

Information refers to the knowledge regarding the hazards of materials and the WHMIS system. Training is the application of knowledge by instructing the worker how to work with the materials safely. Specific WHMIS education and training requirements are regulated in each jurisdiction.

What is confidential business information (CBI)?

For the purposes of maintaining a trade secret, a supplier or employer can apply for a CBI exemption to withhold information about a chemical ingredient and its concentration on labels and safety data sheets.

The exemption permits suppliers to use the generic chemical name for their product instead of listing its chemical abstracts service number (CAS) or concentration (though they are required to use a range in which the concentration falls within). However, suppliers covered by the exemption still must provide enough information to explain the hazard information disclosed on the SDS.

Applications for CBI exemptions are reviewed by Health Canada to ensure the SDS and label information complies with WHMIS requirements, Health Canada assigns a *Hazardous Materials Information Review Act* (HMIRA) Registry Number to exempted products. This number must be listed on the SDS. Never use a product that claims CBI or trade secrets and doesn't include a HIMRA Registry Number.

Are there any hazardous materials not included in WHMIS?

Yes. There are nine categories of materials not covered by WHMIS. While most of these materials do not require an SDS, you should check if the manufacturer has produced one. Sometimes useful information can be found on the manufacturer's website. Remember, if you can't get an SDS, it is a good idea to look at the ingredients of the material to determine if they're dangerous. Your regional health and safety rep can look up information on chemicals if you don't know what they are or can't find any information.

Hazardous materials not covered under WHMIS are:

- consumer products, as defined by the *Canada Consumer Product Safety Act*, including household chemicals and products sold to people for non-commercial purposes in regular stores, in consumer-sized packaging, and that are already labelled following the rules of the Hazardous Products Act
- explosives (any explosive as defined by the *Explosives Act*)
- cosmetics, devices, drugs, or food (as defined by the Food and Drug Act)
- pest control products such as pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, etc. (as defined by the *Pest Control Products Act*)
- nuclear substances (as defined by the Nuclear Safety and Control Act) that are radioactive

- wood and products made of wood
- a manufactured article, such as a car battery or a mercury thermometer
- tobacco or products made of tobacco (as defined in the *Tobacco Act*)
- hazardous wastes (a hazardous product sold for recycling or recovery or intended for disposal)

The following acts and regulations apply to WHMIS:

Alberta	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 29
British Columbia	Workers' Compensation Act
	Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Part 5
Manitoba	Workplace Safety and Health Act
	Workplace Safety and Health Regulation, Part 35
New Brunswick	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System Regulation
Newfoundland and Labrador	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) Regulations
Nova Scotia	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) Regulations
Ontario	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)
Prince Edward Island	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System Regulations

Quebec	Act Respecting Occupational Health and Safety
	Hazardous Products Information Regulation
Saskatchewan	The Saskatchewan Employment Act Part III
	Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Part 22
Northwest Territories	Safety Act
	Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations, Part 22
Nunavut	Safety Act
	Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations, Part 22
Yukon Territories	Occupational Health and Safety Act
	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System Regulation
Federal Sector	Canada Labour Code
	Canadian Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Part X

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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