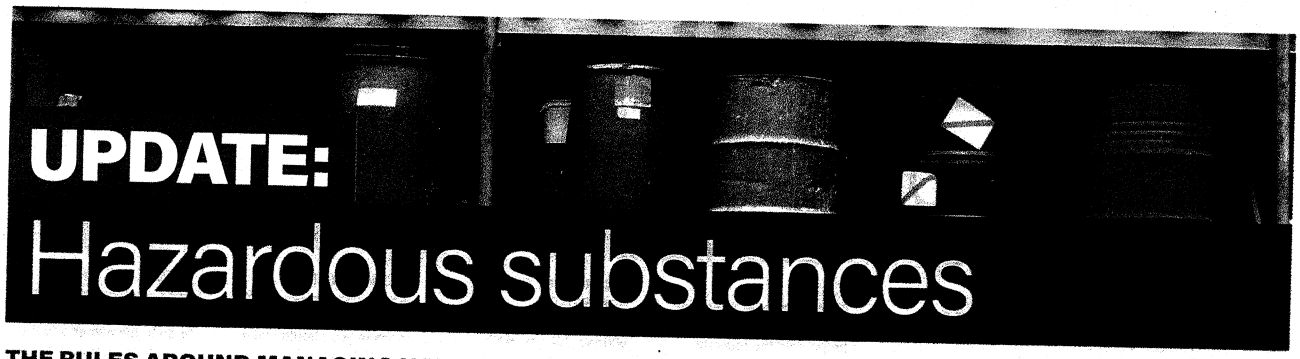


UPDATE: Hazardous substances

THE RULES AROUND MANAGING HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES IN THE WORKPLACE ARE CHANGING. EVERY YEAR AROUND 600-900 PEOPLE DIE PREMATURELY FROM WORKPLACE-RELATED DISEASE, INCLUDING FROM EXPOSURE TO HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES, SO IF YOU ARE ONE OF THE MANY BUSINESSES THAT USE, STORE OR HANDLE HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES, THEN YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO MANAGE THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THEM.

Around 150,000 workplaces throughout New Zealand use hazardous substances. Common hazardous substances like commercial cleaning products, paints, adhesives, acids, bases and solvents can cause serious harm when they aren't used safely.

As of December 2017, the regulations around hazardous substances were transferred from the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 and regulations to the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations.

What is a 'hazardous substance'?

A substance that has one or more of the following properties:

- Explosiveness
- Flammability
- Ability to accelerate a fire
- Is toxic to humans (acute or chronic)
- Corrosiveness (to human tissue or metal)
- Can affect the environment e.g. pesticides
- Could develop one or more of the above properties if it comes into contact with air or water

WorkSafe advises if you are complying with the current hazardous substances law, then you may not need to change a lot. However, it is a good time for all businesses to review their processes for keeping people safe around hazardous substances.

Some of the key changes include:

INVENTORY:

There is a new mandatory requirement to keep an inventory of all your hazardous substances used, handled, manufactured or stored in the workplace, including hazardous waste.

SAFETY DATA SHEETS:

Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are a key source of information about managing your hazardous substances. You must have a SDS for all hazardous substances in your workplace, regardless of the quantity you hold (some exceptions apply). If you are a supplier, manufacturer or importer, go to the EPA website to find out more about SDS.

INFORMATION, INSTRUCTION, TRAINING AND SUPERVISION:

The Regulations have specific requirements around providing information, instruction, supervision and training to make sure workers know how to safely use, handle and store the hazardous substances in their workplace.

EMERGENCY PREPARATION:

You should be managing your risks to avoid an emergency, but it's equally important to plan for one. The Regulations set out specific requirements for this. This includes understanding procedures to deal with emergencies.

LABELLING CONTAINERS OF HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES (including hazardous waste):

There are new requirements for making sure that hazardous substance containers in the workplace are labelled, including process vessels; as well as maintaining the labels on hazardous substances supplied to you.

SIGNS:

These continue to be an important part of hazardous substances management, as they warn other people in the workplace and emergency services that hazardous substances are on site.

FOCUS ON RISK ASSESSMENT AND ELIMINATION OR MINIMISATION:

It is important to manage the risks associated with hazardous substances and to review what you have in place to keep people healthy and safe. Eliminate risks if reasonably practicable and minimise risk where elimination is not possible.

When are the changes happening?

Most requirements under the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations came into force on 1 December, 2017. But in some cases, there are:

- later start dates for some specific regulations, which means you have longer to comply
- rules which allow existing approvals and test certificates issued under the old Regulations to continue until their expiry

To confirm these dates, and for more information on the changes, refer to http://www.worksafe.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/guidance-by-industry/hsno/hazardous-substances-regulations

If you deal with hazardous substances, consider enrolling your workers in Site Safe's Passport Plus – Worker Health course, a four-hour course which covers how hazardous substances, noise and behaviour can have a serious impact on health.

SITESAFE

Site Safe is a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation that promotes, inspires and supports a culture of health and safety in New Zealand construction.