

A Brief Look at Chemicals in the Workplace

In the home or in the office, you might be exposed to injury from hazardous chemicals or gases that are used. It is your responsibility to be aware of this risk by attending all in-services on Hazardous Communication, by reading labels on the materials you use and by knowing where the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) are kept (More about these below). Even then, if you are ever in doubt about the potential hazard, talk to your supervisor!

General safety tips:

- Never mix chemicals. For example, never mix ammonia and bleach for cleaning.
- Report the faintest smell of a gas leak.
- Only use chemicals if it is clearly stated in your job description and your supervisor has given permission.
- Read labels carefully and follow the safety warnings and instructions.

Material Safety Data Sheets are put out by the manufacturer of the product and describe what materials are in the product, what precautions to take in using it and first aid measures to use if you come in contact with the product. These are kept in the office.

One product that direct care personnel come in contact with is oxygen. Oxygen is a colorless, odorless gas that is needed for respiration. It does not burn but it does support and accelerate combustion. When the patient needs it in the home, it can be supplied by a tank (cylinder) or a concentrator. Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions and follow these DO's and DON'Ts:

- Do store oxygen handling equipment in a clean, dry location.
- Don't use equipment that is visibly dirty.
- Do protect masks, cannulas, tubing, etc. in plastic bags to keep them clean.
- Don't allow smoking around oxygen.
- Do open cylinder valves slowly. If released suddenly, there is enough power to drive the heavy cylinder through a wall.
- Do not use oil, grease or products containing them near oxygen as these substances are ideal fire starters, igniting almost spontaneously in oxygen.
- This includes oil from your skin. Wear gloves when working on oxygen hardware to keep oil from your hands off the parts.

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Quiz

Employee: _____ Date: _____

Graded By (RN): _____ Grade: _____

1. It is not important for me to attend in-services on Hazardous Communication because I need the time to care for patients.
 - a) True
 - b) False
2. I've been using cleaning products for years so I don't have to read the label of a new product since they are all basically the same.
 - a) True
 - b) False
3. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) give first aid information.
 - a) True
 - b) False
4. Since oxygen is not flammable, my patient can smoke when wearing the nasal cannula but only if she is up in a chair.
 - a) True
 - b) False