

# SAFETY ALERT!



## Handling hazardous chemical substances

The purpose of this safety alert is to alert employers and employees to risk and consequences when hazardous chemical substances are not handled correctly.

### Background

MAKROSAFE clients reported **20** incidents in **2013** where employees got injured due to the incorrect handling of chemical materials. The employers, altogether, lost **15** working days activity which culminated in **R 5,880.00** cost. One employee was busy blending chemicals when he inhaled the chemical fumes. The employee had to be extracted and was off duty for three days. The total cost to the company was **R 1,713.00**.

### Contributing factors

- Nobody had informed the employee that new products would be used to compile the final mixture.
- The Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) was not communicated to the employees, to highlight the hazards when working with the specific HCS.
- The employee hadn't taken note of warning labels on the containers.
- The employee had removed his protective gear to be able to handle the hot weather better.
- Warm temperatures for several successive days had made the various ingredients very volatile.
- The maintenance crew hadn't been able to fix the extraction fan.

### Action Required

- Keep staff posted about any change in products to be used.
- Keep the recipes, including those of suppliers, off-site to always be able to identify which products could have been the cause of a devastating and destructing incident.
- Ensure that all MSDS's are communicated to all employees involved in the process.
- Ensure that adequate PPE is issued to employees working with HCS.
- Ensure chemicals are stored correctly and in the correct place.
- Install good quality lighting and air-conditioning in places where people work with chemical substances.
- Keep fans, lights, sensors and emergency breakers well-maintained at all times.
- Provide additional showers, first-aid kits, fire extinguishers and other equipment that can be life-saving when incidents with hazardous chemicals happen.
- Send employees that work with hazardous chemicals for medical checks regularly.
- Perform regular drills to keep people aware of their role and actions in case an incident occurs.
- Have contact details of specialised emergency crews close at hand to save valuable time should their assistance be required.

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