

# Hazard Communication: Labels, SDS & the Task

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## Why this matters

A label warns about a product; the task determines how people can be exposed. Before use, connect the container, the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and the planned controls. An unread SDS cannot protect the crew.

Objective: Find the right chemical information and verify the controls needed for this use.

## Key hazards or failure points

An unidentified container; the wrong or inaccessible SDS; transfer without proper identification; incompatible materials; and controls selected without considering the task.

## Practical controls

- Identify the product and the work step before opening or transferring it. Read the label and relevant SDS sections with the crew. Ask about other chemicals, heat or processes that could change the hazard.
- Use the employer's hazard communication program for workplace labels, access to SDSs and training. Do not assume every transferred container is exempt from labeling.
- Translate the information into task controls: approved substitution or containment, ventilation, exposure precautions, compatible storage, selected PPE and emergency arrangements. Resolve unclear instructions with the responsible person before use.

## Verify It in the Field

- Match the container's product identifier to the SDS. Check that the label is readable and the workplace identification meets the program. An unknown container stays out of use until properly identified and assessed.
- Have a crew member retrieve the SDS from the actual work location using the normal access method. Confirm it is immediately accessible during the shift, including when a device, network or language barrier could prevent use.
- Compare the planned work with SDS hazard, handling, exposure-control and incompatibility information. Verify the specified controls at the task: ventilation performance, selected PPE and required emergency arrangements. The SDS alone does not prove these are ready.

## Stop and reassess

Stop for a missing identity, mismatched information, inaccessible SDS, changed chemical or process, failed control, unexpected reaction or exposure. Keep people clear and follow the site emergency or spill procedure; do not improvise cleanup. Resolve the issue, verify the controls, complete required training or rebriefing, and obtain authorization before resuming.

## Ask the crew

- Does this SDS match the product we are actually about to use?
- What changes when we spray, heat, mix or transfer it?
- Show us the required controls and how we reach the SDS and emergency help.

## Match the product, understand the task, verify the controls.

Next step: Record today's changes and checks on the free JSA Planning and Field-Verification Sheet. Supervisor check and attendance are separate.

## [Free JSA planning sheet](#)

References: OSHA 1910.1200, especially labels, SDS access and worker information/training. Expanded explanation and references accompany the web version.