

Decanted Chemicals: Keep the Identity with the Container

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Why this matters

A familiar bottle can contain a different chemical today. Transferring liquid also transfers the responsibility to preserve its identity and warnings until the last use.

Objective: Confirm the receiving container and identification before transfer.

Key hazards or failure points

Unknown contents; reused containers; missing warnings; handoffs; incompatible transfer equipment.

Practical controls

- Use the identified product, matching SDS and approved transfer method. Choose a compatible receiving container and equipment; never use food or drink containers.
- Apply the workplace labeling system before the container enters use. Keep the product identifier and required hazard information legible through storage and handling.
- Review any immediate-use exception with the responsible person. It covers only the transferring employee's exclusive control and use within that shift; handing it off changes the situation.

Verify It in the Field

Compare the source identifier, SDS and prepared receiving label before opening. Similar color, smell or bottle shape proves nothing about contents.

Check the actual container, closure and transfer equipment against product instructions. Confirm required splash, ventilation and ignition controls through the specified checks.

Ask the next user to identify the contents and retrieve the SDS. Resolve a mismatch before transfer or use; record the product and finding.

Stop and reassess

Hold for uncertain identity, damaged containers, unreadable labels or an unplanned handoff. Keep people clear of leaks and follow the response plan; do not sniff or sample unknown contents.

Ask the crew

1. What identifies this liquid?
2. Will anyone else use this container?
3. What keeps its warnings readable?

Use this HOP tool — Self-checking: Using a clean, empty demonstration container, pause before the imagined transfer. Match its intended identifier to the source information, explain the next action and expected result, then identify what would interrupt the sequence. Resolve uncertainty before any real chemical is opened.

Sources: OSHA 1910.1200, Appendix D; 1926.59; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 18–19. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/decanted-chemicals-container-identity