

Why Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System? Its all about Health and Safety

It is critical that property managers and management companies know what constitutes a hazardous materials...

Contributor: Planet Clean

This is a daunting news story but what does it mean to other organizations? The School Board employs thousands of workers while many corporations and organizations often only employ a handful of people.

WHMIS is a Canada-wide system designed to give employers and workers information about hazardous materials used in the workplace. WHMIS applies to all workplaces covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, regardless of the number of employees or size of the organization.

Any worker who works with or near hazardous materials must be trained in how to use and handle them safely. They need to be familiar with the WHMIS symbols, workplace procedures for labelling containers, location of Material Safety Data Sheets and use and care of any personal protective equipment necessary to handle the products safely.

WHMIS is now over 25 years old and yet many managers and their organizations are not aware of how the Canadian Occupational Health and Safety Act affects them. WHMIS requires that all workers must be trained regarding the specifics of their work environment.

Who is covered by the legislation? If a corporation employs staff who use cleaning products, they must be trained. If there is a superintendent who maintains the pool or spa chemicals, they must be trained. Is there a general maintenance person who takes care of repairs, welding, pest control etc? Who is responsible for the training? Under

the legislation, the employer must ensure that workers are informed, products are labelled and documentation available.

During the investigation of the events that resulted in the death of an evening shift part-time caretaker at the school, the fire captain retrieved two cleaners—a sanitizer/deodorizer and a liquid toilet bowl cleaner. When mixed together, the two cleaners created a dangerous, corrosive, chlorine gas which within only a few hours killed the caretaker. The Ministry of Labour determined that the caretaker had not received proper and appropriate instruction on the products as required by the WHMIS regulations.

As in the case with the school board, it is critical that property managers and management companies know what constitutes a hazardous material, what hazardous materials employees may be exposed to, whether employees know how to handle the materials properly, how and where to find information about the materials, what to do in an emergency, and what their responsibilities are as employers and for whom they are responsible.

Knowing the WHMIS regulations and implementing them is one of the first steps in creating a safe and healthy work environment. 

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