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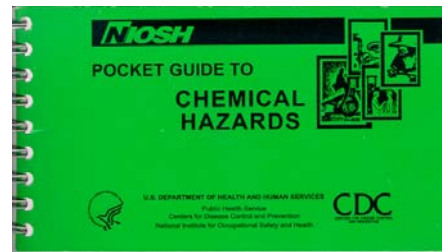
SIP TIP: KNOW YOUR CHEMICALS - LOOK AT LABELS AND THAT MSDS!!

Did you ever wonder what was in those containers of chemicals you use on a daily basis? Probably not! If you're in the building trades, you just know it was what you learned to use early during your apprenticeship and have used ever since. If you're not in the trades, you just know you went to your local home improvement store and the guy told you, "You want to use this for that project."

But take a few minutes and read the labels. As a requirement of the Hazard Communication Standard, manufacturers or importers are required to label chemical products and also create a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). Both labels and the MSDS provide a wealth of information. Don't bog yourself down with details. While you likely don't need to know the chemical formula, it may be important for you to know:

- **Personal Protective Equipment Recommended:** Is the material acidic or caustic? If so, gloves would be prudent to avoid burns. Of course, since we are all **WEARING SAFETY GLASSES AT ALL TIMES**, we don't need to worry about that. But perhaps a faceshield is necessary to avoid splash injuries. And if the chemical brings inhalation hazards, perhaps a respiratory is needed.
- **The Specific Gravity or Vapor Density:** If the material is a gas, is it lighter or heavier than air? If it is a solid or liquid, does the vapor phase rise or sink. Look at the MSDS:
 - If the specific gravity (for gases) or vapor density (for off-vapors from solids and liquids) listed is less than 1 (e.g., 0.906), the gas or off-vapor is lighter than air.
 - For example, the specific of carbon monoxide is 0.97. So it is slightly lighter than air, and you would expect concentrations near the ceiling to be higher than at the ground level. On the other hand, a common brand of plastic pipe cement has a vapor density of 2.5. No doubt the vapors from this product are going to accumulate in a low lying area, like a trench - or a pipe chase - or a sump - or a vault.
- **To Use Syrup of Ipecac or Not to Use Syrup of Ipecac, that is the Question:** Think back to your childhood. There was probably a small bottle of this wonderful syrup on hand in your house in case you ate or drank something you shouldn't have. Two tablespoons and "voilà", time to break out the mop! And while it's unlikely a person would knowingly ingest a hazardous chemical, stranger things have happened. **READ THE LABEL.** For certain chemicals, like solvents, inducing vomiting will actually do more harm than good (to the respiratory track, for instance).

A great resource for general information about approximately 680 workplace chemicals is the NIOSH Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards. You can receive a single, free copy of this pocket guide by calling NIOSH at 1-800-356-4674. Follow the prompts and request Publication 97-140. Various versions (e.g., printed copy, html, CD-ROM) of the guide are also available by accessing the NIOSH website at www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html. Click on "Publications and Products," click on "Publications List 1996-2004," and then scroll down to Publication 97-140.



REMINDER: DON'T TAKE CHEMICALS FOR GRANTED. KNOW WHAT YOU'RE USING, AND KNOW HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF.