

Preventing Hazardous Chemical Poisonings

Poisonings can be prevented, but if one occurs, call the nationwide toll-free number for poison centers, 1-800-222-1222, immediately.

Take the following steps to prevent poisonings.

When buying a potentially hazardous chemical:

- Look for safer alternatives to hazardous products.
- Buy the least hazardous product.
- Buy only as much as you need to do the job at hand.
- Beware that "nontoxic" products can still contain hazardous ingredients.
- Read the entire label carefully, especially for additional health warnings.
- Buy hazardous products in child-resistant packaging.
- Avoid aerosol products because the droplets can be deeply inhaled into the lungs and quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.

When using a potentially hazardous chemical:

- Read all labels before using hazardous products, paying careful attention to proper use instructions and dangers.
- Twice as much does not mean improved results.
- Do not mix chemicals because it can cause explosive or poisonous chemical reactions.
- If pregnant, avoid toxic chemical exposure. Many toxic products have not been tested for their effects on unborn children.
- During use, keep hazardous products out of the reach of small children. Do not leave products unattended or unsealed.
- Avoid wearing soft contact lenses when working with solvents and pesticides because they can absorb vapors from the air and hold the chemical against your eyes.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while using hazardous products. Traces of hazardous chemicals can be carried from hand to mouth. Smoking can start a fire if the product is flammable.
- Use products in well-ventilated areas to avoid inhaling fumes.
- Use protective gloves, goggles and respirators that are appropriate to the task if the product presents hazards to skin, eyes or lungs.
- Clean up after using hazardous products. Carefully seal products and properly refasten all caps.

When storing a potentially hazardous chemical:

- Keep products out of the reach of children and animals. Store all hazardous products away from food items in locked cabinets or in cabinets with childproof latches.
- Make sure lids and caps are tightly sealed and childproof.
- Make certain all products are clearly labeled before storing them.
- Leave products in their original containers with the contents clearly identified on the labels. Never put hazardous products in food or beverage containers.
- Keep products away from sources of heat, spark, flame or ignition such as pilot lights, switches and motors. This is especially important with flammable products and aerosol cans.
- Store products containing volatile chemicals, or those that warn of vapors or fumes, in a well-ventilated area.
- Never store rags contaminated with flammable solvents because they can spontaneously start on fire. Follow the directions on the product label regarding the disposal of solvent-covered rags. If there are no directions, place the rags in an airtight, metal container and store the container outside your house away from other structures until it can be picked up with the trash.
- Store gasoline and liquid propane gas tanks only in safety-approved containers in a well-ventilated area away from all sources of heat, flame, or spark.
- Keep a working ABC-rated, or Multi-Purpose Dry Chemical, fire extinguisher in your home.
- Keep containers dry to prevent corrosion.

Steps for cleaning up spills of potentially hazardous chemicals:

- Remove children and pets from the area where the spill occurred.
- Ventilate the area.
- Do not attempt to use cleaning products to clean up the spill.
- At a minimum, wear the appropriate protective gloves for the product. Other safety equipment may be required for volatile solvents, pesticides or corrosive products.
- Contain the spill to a small area by soaking it up with a non-flammable absorbent material, such as clay-based kitty litter.
- Put the contaminated material into a non-corroding container. A plastic bucket with a tight-fitting lid is recommended.
- Seal the container and label it with the product name, approximate amount of product, absorbent material used, date, and the word DANGER or POISON.
- Contact local solid waste authorities for information on how to dispose of the contaminated material or save for a household hazardous waste collection (call www.earth911.com for more information).
- After the spill has been absorbed, thoroughly rinse the area several times with water and rags. Then wash the area carefully to remove remaining traces of the product.