



Working with Toxic Chemicals



Many chemicals used in agriculture, including fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, animal medications, cleaning agents and solvents, are hazardous to your health. Before you begin working with any chemical, identify its potential hazards, become familiar with how to best protect yourself and be aware of the procedures to follow if an incident takes place.

General Safety Precautions

The manufacturer's label and Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each chemical you handle provide important information regarding hazards, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), proper handling, transport, storage and disposal of chemicals. Each time you encounter a chemical, read this information and take the appropriate precautions. In addition, the following recommendations apply when working with any toxic chemical.

- » Wear the appropriate PPE when handling chemicals. The two most common ways that chemicals enter the body are through the skin and through inhalation. PPE such as coveralls and respirators are designed to protect you.
- » Use the least hazardous chemical option for the task at hand and prepare only the amount that is absolutely necessary for completing the job.
- » Never eat, drink, smoke or apply cosmetics while working with chemicals.
- » Make sure that the equipment used to apply chemicals is in good working order and does not have any leaks.
- » Do not work alone. Always maintain communication.
- » Clean equipment thoroughly in an area where run-off will not create other hazards or contaminate the environment or water source.
- » Wash work clothes separately from street clothes or wear disposable clothing.
- » Wash your body thoroughly after using chemicals and before eating, drinking, smoking or using the restroom.

Exposure

If a co-worker is exposed to a toxic chemical, consult the SDS and the product label before taking action. The correct response to exposure is as important as immediate action.

If the injured or ill person is having trouble breathing, is having convulsions or is unconscious, provide the necessary first aid and call 9-1-1.

If the injured or ill person does not have any of the symptoms listed above, contact the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222. When calling, keep the chemical container handy to accurately instruct the operator about the type of exposure the person has experienced. He or she will then be able to give you correct instructions.

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