

Spot The Safety Violation: You Should Judge a Container by Its Label



What's wrong with these containers of hazardous substances, particularly their labels'



When you use or have hazardous substances in the workplace, they must be properly labeled so that workers know what kind of substances they are, what health and safety hazards they pose and the proper precautions to take when using them. In fact, that's why the [WHMIS](#) system exists and requires labels meeting specific requirements on substances deemed 'hazardous products.'

In this picture from the University of Kentucky, there are several containers of hazardous substances. Two of the bottles have labels, but these labels are essentially useless. One bottle of hydrobromic acid is missing half its label. The label on the other bottle is so stained and discoloured its illegible. And the other two bottles don't have any labels at all!

Hazardous Substance Label Requirements

Under [WHMIS 2015](#)'s label requirements, so-called 'hazardous products' must have either a:

- [Supplier label](#) provided by the company that sold, imported or distributed the product; or
- [Workplace label](#) provided by the employer.

A workplace label is needed in several circumstances, such as when the supplier's label becomes illegible, gets damaged, is removed or falls off. In that case, the employer must affix either a new supplier label, if one is available, or a workplace label.

A workplace label must generally include:

- A product identifier identical to that found on the [safety data sheet](#) (SDS) for the hazardous product;
- Information for the safe handling of the hazardous product; and
- That an SDS, if supplied or produced, is available.

6 Key Elements of Safe Hazardous Substances Storage

In addition to ensuring that hazardous substances in your workplace are properly labeled, make sure that you also comply with the requirements for [storage of hazardous substances](#) in your jurisdiction's OHS law. There are six basic elements of safe storage:

1. **Inventory.** [Take an inventory](#) to determine exactly how many hazardous substances are used, handled or stored in your workplace, what kinds and in what amounts.
2. **Storage area.** Designate an appropriate area for storage of hazardous substances. Your storage area can be as small as a cabinet or as large as an entire room or even a building. The designated area should meet certain criteria, such as it should be fire-resistant and have adequate ventilation and lighting.
3. **Quantities.** To reduce the effects of any incident involving hazardous substances, try to limit the quantities you keep on-hand.
4. **Storage methods.** Within the designated area, ensure that

safe methods are used to store the hazardous substances. For example, keep incompatible substances separate, ensure containers aren't damaged and store heavy containers are lower shelves.

5. **Labels.** As discussed above, ensure that all containers of hazardous substances are properly labeled. Replace any labels that are missing, damaged or illegible'such as the ones on two of the bottles in the picture.
6. **Signs.** The storage area, room, cabinet or building should be clearly identified as containing hazardous substances with signs, placards or similar means of identification.