

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Hazardous Substance Awareness - Introduction

[Reference: Parts 1910, 1915, and 1926, subpart Z; 1926 subpart Z]

This 12-part series of toolbox talks covers general awareness of common hazardous substances that some employees may encounter in the workplace. These substances can pose potential health risks if employee exposures are high and proper precautions are not taken. Topics include materials commonly found in construction, manufacturing, and shipyard operations, as well as older buildings, vessels, and equipment.

The purpose of these talks is to help you understand the potential hazards of each substance, the forms in which they may exist, and the types of products or work processes where they may be present. These talks are not intended to replace OSHA-required training for employees exposed above action limits or permissible exposure limits. Those employees must receive formal OSHA-mandated training, possible medical surveillance, and specialized personal protective equipment as required. These toolbox talks are designed to raise awareness and supplement, not substitute for, required training.

It is important to understand that merely being around a hazardous substance does not necessarily mean you are overexposed or at imminent risk. OSHA has established exposure thresholds, including action limits and permissible exposure limits, that trigger specific employer responsibilities. In these cases, employers can conduct air monitoring to quantify actual employee exposure levels and determine if controls are needed and effective. When proper controls, work practices, and protective measures are in place, employees can work safely around these substances without harm.

Understanding hazards is essential, but so is doing your part to implement and maintain effective controls. These may include utilizing engineering controls like ventilation or dust collection, adherence to safe work procedures, proper use of personal protective equipment, using good hygiene practices, and following company safety rules. In some cases, it may also be necessary to prevent contaminated clothing or equipment from being taken home, as certain substances can pose a risk to family members, particularly children. When this is a concern, proper handling, storage, and decontamination procedures are essential.

These talks are designed to give you practical information that can be applied during everyday work. Awareness, proper training, consistent adherence to safety procedures, and maintaining engineering controls are all critical to working safely around hazardous substances. By following these controls and work practices, employees can perform their tasks safely without unnecessary concern.

If you are ever unsure about a substance you encounter, how it should be handled, or if you see warning signs, labels, or other indicators of a hazardous material you are not familiar with, contact your safety manager, supervisor, or other workplace representative for guidance. Please be sure to sign the training certification form to ensure you get credit for attending today's OSHA toolbox talk.

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Company Name: _____

Date: _____

Training led by: _____

PRINT NAME

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