

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Automotive service and repair industry – Chemicals

Harmful chemicals used in automotive service and repair industry

Chemicals are used everyday in automotive servicing and repair and some of these have the potential to injure people or make them sick. These chemicals are called hazardous substances. Some common hazardous substances used in automotive service and repair industry include:

- solvent cleaners – including substances like turpentine, kerosene etc. which may contain hazardous ingredients such as xylene and others
- solvent degreasers – may contain turpentine, methylene chloride
- acids – such as battery acid which contains sulphuric acid
- aluminium cleaners which contain highly dangerous hydrofluoric acid
- brake pad dust – may contain some asbestos fibres.

Used engine oil may be a concern, as the combustion by-products commonly found within the oil are known carcinogens.

These are only some of the chemicals you might be using. You need to identify and control all the harmful chemicals used in your business.

Using or storing hazardous substances

If you store or use hazardous substances you need to:

- ensure all chemical containers have a label on them, clearly identifying what it is and the main safety information about the chemical (e.g. 'Flammable', 'Toxic if

swallowed' referred to as risk and safety phrases). DO NOT use old drink or food containers to store chemicals

- obtain a material safety data sheet (MSDS) from your chemical supplier for all hazardous substances you have
- read the MSDS and do a written risk assessment to identify ways you can use the chemical more safely - this assessment is used to help identify what could go wrong and to allow solutions to be put in place to prevent or minimise risks to workers
- put a copy of the MSDS in a register with a list of all the chemicals at the front, as well as the written risk assessment
- put into place the decisions made, based on the risk assessment, to ensure the chemical is used safely
- train workers who use the chemicals in safe chemical use
- ensure the MSDS and risk assessments are available at all times, for reference, by the people using the chemicals.

Safe chemical use

When you do a risk assessment for each chemical, you need to decide on the safest way to use each chemical. Some questions to consider when making these decisions include:

- **Can I get rid of the chemical altogether?** If you do not need it, get rid of it. You may even be able to change some processes to make some chemicals unnecessary.
- **Can the chemical be substituted for something less harmful?** Chemical

manufacturers are frequently developing new products that do the same job but are less harmful. Or there may be alternative processes that use less harmful chemicals.

- **Can I prevent people coming in contact with the chemical?** For example, it may be possible to have chemicals automatically pumped to where it needs to be used, eliminating the need for workers to do it by hand. Similarly, if chemicals need to be diluted or mixed, buying it pre-diluted or mixed will eliminate the need for your workers to do it by hand.
- **Do I have adequate ventilation to remove chemical fumes?** Some chemicals can give off fumes that people can inhale. This should be highlighted in the MSDS if it is likely to occur. If it is possible, you might be able to remove the fume from the workplace through an exhaust system or by increasing the flow of fresh air into the area. **IMPORTANT:** Do not rely on being able to smell a chemical to know if people are breathing in fumes, as some chemicals have very little to no odour.

- **Do I have work procedures that limit people's exposure to the chemical?** Developing good work procedures can help minimise people's exposure to chemicals. For example, ensure:
 - equipment is properly maintained to prevent leaks
 - flammable chemicals are stored away from heat sources
 - chemical spill procedures are in place
 - work involving chemicals is done when there are no people around
 - people have been trained on how to use the chemical safely.
- **Have I provided people using the chemicals with the right protective equipment?** If you cannot prevent people being exposed to a chemical in any other way, you must provide people with the right personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, masks, aprons). The right protective equipment for each chemical is set out in the MSDS for that chemical.

For further information on chemicals and other workplace health and safety issues call 1300 369 915 or visit www.deir.qld.gov.au

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