



HAZARDS

Hazardous Chemicals, Substances & Dangerous Goods in Aged Care

Many of the chemicals regularly stored and used in aged care facilities are classified as hazardous. Hazardous chemicals are substances, mixtures or articles that can be harmful to a user's health if they are ingested, touched, inhaled or come into contact with the eyes. They may also cause property and environmental damage.

The handling, storage and use of hazardous chemicals in the workplace is controlled by specific legislation, regulations and codes in all Australian states and territories.

Hazardous chemicals categorised as skin irritants, carcinogens or respiratory sensitisers pose health hazards through direct contact or exposure, usually through inhalation, skin contact or ingestion.

Flammable, corrosive, explosive, reactive or oxidising chemicals pose a chemical and physiological hazard, becoming dangerous when they are handled or used inappropriately rather than through contact or exposure.

When might this hazard occur?

Powerful industrial disinfectants, solvents and caustic substances are often used for cleaning in aged care facilities. These substances can pose a serious risk to the health and safety of workers, residents and family members who may sustain injuries from direct exposure through skin contact or inhalation. Where possible, workers should perform cleaning tasks without using hazardous chemicals, substituting them with less toxic alternatives. If hazardous chemicals must be used, personal protective equipment such as respirators, gloves and goggles should be worn to reduce the risks to health and safety. Ventilation should be carefully considered, especially when cleaning small or confined spaces, as should the provision of adequate training and supervision.

The decanting of hazardous chemicals is commonplace in aged care facilities where substances such as cleaning products are often purchased in bulk. This practice places workers at risk of injury through direct contact or exposure and should, if possible, be avoided. If the decanting or mixing of hazardous chemicals cannot be avoided workers must receive adequate training in handling and safety procedures and wear personal protective equipment to minimise the risk of exposure. Once decanted or mixed, hazardous chemicals must be stored in suitable, safe containers which are correctly labelled and isolated from workers, residents and family members in a secured storage area.



What do I need to do?

Under work health and safety laws an aged care facility has a duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace. In order to meet these obligations and their duty of care to residents, an aged care facility must have robust policies in place in relation to the handling use and storage of hazardous chemicals. The facility must also provide adequate training and respond to and investigate complaints. You should also:

- ◆ Review the requirements in your state or territory in relation to hazardous chemicals.
- ◆ Identify the risks associated with hazardous chemicals in your workplace. Ask yourself these questions:
 - What might happen?
 - When might it happen?
 - Why might it happen?
 - What could cause this to happen? (there may be multiple causes)
 - What has happened in the past?
- ◆ Consider what you are currently doing to manage the risk associated with hazardous chemicals (also known as controls).
- ◆ Consult with workers, volunteers and health and safety representatives to develop policies and procedures around the storage and use of hazardous chemicals, investigations, complaints and grievances.
- ◆ Conduct a hazardous chemicals awareness session for all workers, including contractors and volunteers.
- ◆ Develop and implement any new controls necessary.

Specific requirements for aged care facilities include:

- ◆ Following correct procedures for the labelling of chemicals.
- ◆ Maintaining a register and manifest.
- ◆ Obtaining current Safety Data Sheets (SDS) from the manufacturer, importer or supplier of a chemical. SDS provide information on the identity, ingredients, potential health effects, toxicology properties, physical hazards, safe use, handling and storage, emergency procedures and disposal requirements specific to each chemical.
- ◆ Ensuring exposure standards are not exceeded.
- ◆ Providing health monitoring and training for workers.
- ◆ Ensuring the provision and availability of fire protection as well as fire-fighting, emergency and safety equipment.

Practical Help

- ◆ [SafeWork Australia](#)

If you would like further information about hazardous chemicals, substances & dangerous goods in aged care please contact the *risksupport* Helpdesk on:

1300 660 827
helpdesk@risksupport.org.au

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