

3.2.1 Safety data sheets

Employers making a risk assessment for a substance (or preparation) that is classified under existing European Directives must consider, and take into account, the information the supplier provides on the safety data sheet. These sheets provide users of hazardous chemical agents with some of the information they need to protect the health of employees and for handling the substance safely in the workplace. The safety data sheet contains information under a number of obligatory headings, e.g. “hazard identification”, “exposure controls – personal protection”, “storage”, “first aid”, etc., and is a useful source of information in helping employers make the decisions required for the risk assessment.

Guidelines to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) Regulations, 2001

Accurate, complete and correct information on safety data sheets is essential when considering workplace controls: e.g. over-classification of a substance might lead to unnecessarily stringent controls; under-classification may result in risks to employees' health. If employers have concerns about the quality and reliability of information provided on a data sheet, or if they are unsure of the application of the information to their situation, they should contact the supplier for clarification or for further guidance. Up-to-date safety data sheets must be obtained from the supplier as classification may change as newer information concerning chemical agents comes to light.

Where a chemical agent is produced within a process and there is a risk of exposure to that chemical agent within the plant or premises, the employer must endeavour to find out the hazardous properties of that substance and the control measures necessary to reduce the risk of exposure to as low a level as is reasonably practicable. This could involve the use of knowledge, experience, available data and, if necessary, the carrying out of appropriate tests.

Extract from the HSA Guidelines to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) Regulations, 2001(S.I. No. 619 of 2001)