

## Accessing Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for Chemicals used in a Facility

### What information do MSDSs provide?

The Ontario Health and Safety Act mandates that Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for hazardous substances in facilities be available to employees and to the public. The sheets contain health and safety information such as: health and environmental exposure risks, first aid recommendations, personal protection, spill and disposal procedures, storage and handling, etc. An example of an MSDS can be found at <http://www.ccohs.ca/products/databases/samples/msds.html>.

### How do I access MSDSs?

Every employee has a right view the MSDSs for hazardous substances in their workplaces by simply asking their employer. A facility's MSDSs can be acquired by the public through a formal request to the local Medical Officer of Health (MOH). The MOH is required by law to ask the facility for the MSDSs requested, while keeping the identity of the individual anonymous. Facilities are required to give the MOH the MSDSs, which are then passed on to the requesting individual.

### What information do MSDSs leave out?

MSDSs do not contain any information concerning the amounts used or released on-site. They are only valid for three years, so they tend to be out of date. Knowledge concerning information contained in MSDSs changes so rapidly that as many of 60, 000 of the 200,000 available MSDSs may be outdated and incorrect regarding health and safety recommendations. On-site inventories of MSDSs are often incomplete.

### Why are MSDSs useful?

This information is useful for discovering what chemicals are used in your workplace or in a local facility in your community, and thereby identifying if there is further need for concern and action.

### What have MSDSs been used for in the past?

Employees regularly access MSDSs to ensure health and safety standards in the workplace are adequate with respect to the chemicals workers are being exposed to. Very few public requests to access MSDS inventories have been made. In 1999 Toronto firefighters made a public request after the USE Hickson fire that occurred in Scarborough in order to find out what chemicals they were potentially exposed to while fighting the blaze. The firefighters now regularly request the MSDSs for industrial fire locations to track potential toxic exposures and health impacts.

### Is a formal request required to access MSDSs?

Yes. You must submit a formal request to the Medical Officer of Health who can then require a company to provide MSDSs on behalf of the public. When sending in your formal request, include the following from section 38 of the OHS Act to highlight the MOH's duty to respond to your request:

*Ontario Health and Safety Act, Section 38*

*(2) The medical officer of health, at the request of any person, shall request an employer to furnish a copy of an unexpired material safety data sheet. 2001, c. 9, Sched. I, s. 3 (9).*

*Same*

*(3) At the request of any person, the medical officer of health shall make available to the person for inspection a copy of any material safety data sheet requested by the person and in the possession of the medical officer of health. 2001, c. 9, Sched. I, s. 3 (9).*

*Idem*

*(4) A medical officer of health shall not disclose the name of any person who makes a request under subsection (2) or (3). R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1, s. 38 (4).*