

OSHA Standards in Chemical Plants

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration issues standards for safe handling of toxic substances in chemical plants. These standards apply to any company that stores, manufactures or distributes large quantities of any hazardous chemical. Some of the protective measures OSHA employs include detection of dangerous chemicals, distribution of protective equipment to workers, and distribution of information on the substances as well as emergency procedures to follow in case of exposure.

Chemical Storage

A company must designate a storage area for hazardous chemicals that is at least 100 feet away from any surface water and is downhill from any wells or food storage. A chemical storage area must be downwind from nearby residences and in a flat location that will not flood. Containers of chemicals must not be placed above eye level, on the floor or in direct sunlight.

Medical Care

The employer must provide its employees with medical treatment if they display signs of chemical exposure. The company must also monitor the hazard levels present in the workplace and offer medical care to any workers known to have been exposed to levels above the maximum acceptable standards. Physicians and other medical professionals are only permitted to notify the employer of diagnoses related to the employee's exposure to workplace hazards and may not disclose any other information from the employee's medical records.

Exposure Documentation

After the medical staff examines an employee due to chemical exposure, it must submit written documentation to the employer detailing the diagnosis and any pertinent test results. This documentation must also include any follow-up medical treatment the employee should pursue. If the employee is subject to any additional health risk in the future due to his exposure to hazardous chemicals in the workplace, the physician's documentation must explain those risks. The employee must verify in writing that he has been given a copy of the employer's report.

Disclosure Requirements

All chemical plants must have a chemical hygiene plan on site that details the operating procedures to follow when a worker is exposed to a toxic substance. The plan must be updated every year. Any employees working near hazardous chemicals must be trained on the updated emergency procedures. The employer is required to maintain material safety data sheets relating to each hazardous substance stored or produced at the work site. All containers holding hazardous chemicals must be properly marked according to OSHA's labeling standards.