

WORKING SAFELY WITH CORROSIVES

Corrosives are materials so powerful that they can damage or destroy metal. In humans, they can attack and chemically destroy body tissues as soon as they touch the skin, eyes or lungs. Although corrosives can be dangerous, they needn't be harmful if they are handled, stored, and disposed of safely. Everyone who works with corrosives should be aware of their potential hazards and follow all safety precautions and recommended handling and storage procedures.

Corrosive materials are present in almost any workplace either by themselves or contained in other products. Common acid corrosives include hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, acetic acid, and nitric acid. Common alkaline/bases include ammonium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide, and sodium hydroxide (caustic soda). Cement contains lime, which is a base or caustic compound.

Cleaning compounds may contain acids or bases. Before using a material, always read the MSDS to know what's in the material and to learn how to use it safely.

Corrosives can burn and destroy body tissues on contact. The stronger or more concentrated the corrosive material is and the longer it touches the body, the worse the injuries will be. Some corrosives are toxic and can cause other health effects. Check the MSDS and the label on the container for warnings of possible health effects.

Following these basic safe work practices will help protect you and your coworkers from the hazards of corrosive materials:

- Obtain and read the MSDS for all of the materials you work with.
- Be aware of all of the hazards (fire, health, reactivity) of the materials you work with.
- Know which of the materials you work with are corrosives.
- Wear the proper personal protective equipment when working with corrosive materials.
- Store corrosives in suitable containers away from incompatible materials.
- Store, handle, and use corrosives in well-ventilated areas.
- Handle containers safely to avoid damaging them.

- Dispense corrosives carefully and keep containers closed when not in use.
- Stir corrosives slowly and carefully into cold water when the job requires mixing corrosives and water. (Rule to remember: AAA - Always Add Acids to water - this also applies to bases).
- Handle and dispose of corrosive wastes safely.
- Practice good housekeeping, personal cleanliness, and equipment maintenance.
- Know how to handle emergencies (spills, fires, injuries) involving corrosive materials.
- Always follow the health and safety rules that apply to you job.

If you should get corrosive material on you, remove any contaminated clothing, rinse yourself off immediately, and seek medical attention.

