

To Your Health

The Art Studio as Laboratory

Hazardous chemicals and other toxic materials are commonplace in the art studio and darkroom. The health hazards which exist are similar to those found in chemistry and biology laboratories. The safety equipment needed and the preventive and curative maintenance programs followed in all the above laboratories, have much in common. In effect, the visual arts are laboratory sciences, albeit the most creative.

In disciplines such as painting, design, photography, printmaking, ceramics, metal-working, and wood working, hazardous chemicals are used such as:

- Flammable solvents, markers, paints and paint removers.
- Corrosive acids and bases.
- Toxic solvents, vapors and dusts.

The OSHA Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) was employed by management to inform all staff members who are exposed to chemical hazards in their workplace about the chemicals they are using and about the risks they face. Proper chemical labeling and knowledge of, and access to, material safety data sheets (MSDS) are centerpieces of this training program.

On January 31, 1990 OSHA adopted the Laboratory Standard, 29 CFR 1910.1450, which requires employers to strengthen safety and health programs covering laboratory personnel. It defines a laboratory as a facility where relatively small quantities of hazardous chemicals are used on a non-productive basis. Therefore its contents apply to art studios and darkrooms as well as in other laboratories.

The provisions of the HCS have been incorporated into the Laboratory Standard (for laboratory staff), which also requires that a Chemical Hygiene Plan (CHP) be generated and implementation by management. Some requirements of the CHP are:

- a) Describe procedures to be followed during routine handling, storage and disposal of chemicals, as well as those required in the event of fire, spill, explosion or medical emergency.
- b) Explain how protective measures are taken— how fume hoods, ventilation systems, safety showers, eyewash stations, explosions-proof spray booths and refrigerators, and fire extinguishers function and are maintained properly.
- c) Describe how gloves, goggles, respirators and other safety and health equipment will be made available to employees.

Art Studios Need to be Included in the Chemical Hygiene Plan.

Even a cursory examination of any acceptable generic chemical hygiene plan makes it obvious that art laboratories and darkrooms should be included. Art department personnel, due to the nature of their work, and the materials that they use, require the type of training and safety maintenance programs inherent in the plan.

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