

Don't get left holding the bag with designated substances



Jeff Clarke
Chair, Trade
Contractors Section

I am surprised by how many companies are exposed to unnecessary risk by not understanding and complying with the applicable regulations around designated substances. Everyone involved in our industry needs to protect themselves and their employees from this all too common situation.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour has identified eleven designated substances under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA): acrylonitrile, arsenic, asbestos, benzene, coke oven emissions, ethylene oxide, isocyanates, lead, mercury, silica and vinyl chloride. For companies working in and around Ottawa, you will commonly encounter asbestos and lead. It is vital for you to understand and comply with all the current regulations. Section 30 of the OHSA lays out your responsibilities. Be sure you and your staff follow all the appropriate guidelines. It's for everyone's health and safety. For the purpose of the rest of this article I'll refer primarily to asbestos, but the principles will be similar for the other designated substances as well.

Knowing what you are dealing with is the critical first step. The Designated Substance Report is meant to list all hazards. When you arrive on-site or get involved in a project, carefully inspect the Designated Substance Report and make sure the report is up to date. Regulations are constantly being amended and it's imperative that the Designated Substance Report is current. Unless you are sure about the situation on the worksite, you will not be able to take the necessary precautions, potentially endangering yourself and your employees. Even worse, you may also unknowingly spread the hazard beyond the originally affected areas, which may require considerably more effort and expense

(on your part) to remedy and contain. For example, you may inadvertently contaminate a central ventilation system and spread asbestos from a previously confined location throughout the building. This would require considerably more resources to remedy.

Train your people on the latest health and safety requirements. They must follow all required safety procedures to protect themselves and the building. When designated substances are involved, your responsibility does not end at the worksite; disposal of hazardous waste materials requires careful handling and specific permits for transportation off-site.

Despite all the training and preparation possible, incidents may still arise. For this reason, it's important that you carry the appropriate liability insurance. This provides you a final element of protection should any unforeseen incidents arise.

You may have heard about company that was recently fined \$50,000 by the Ontario Ministry of Labour under the OHSA. The inspectors found that the five workers had not protected themselves from exposure to asbestos-containing materials found in the partially demolished building.

I strongly encourage that you seek the expertise of an environmental consultant when dealing with designated substances. Their knowledge in identifying, handling and disposal requirements with help guide you in right direction.

Remember, if you walk onto a site without doing your diligence and understanding the requirements under the act, you may be left holding the bag.



Working with leading contractors C&M Electric brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the electrical design and implementation of a project.

We are pleased to have worked on a number of recognizable projects and we look forward to working with you.

3038 Carp Road, Carp, ON K0A 1L0
TEL: 613-839-3232 | FAX: 613-839-3443 | www.cmelectric.com