The Hazard Communication Fact Sheet for Office Staff provides the hazard communication training for employees who work in the offices by alerting them to the potential hazardous substances that may be encountered in any office environment.

Washington State Labor and Industries has an occupational safety and health standard called Hazard Communication (Right to Know) that requires that employees be informed about hazardous chemicals in the workplace through labeling, material safety data sheets (MSDSs), and training.

Employees in office environments work with a variety of products that may contain small amounts of hazardous chemicals. Safe exposure limits have been established for many hazardous chemical substances below which no adverse health effects are expected to occur. These limits are based on continuous exposure for 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week throughout a working career. Since most office products are used intermittently and in small quantities, exposure to these products is not expected to exceed safe limits or produce adverse health effects. In addition, most of these products are consumer products and therefore meet the more stringent regulations for consumer product safety.

This fact sheet contains information on a number of office products that may contain hazardous substances. You have access to other sources of information on this subject, namely container labels and material safety data sheets (MSDSs) or Safety Data Sheets (SDSs). MSDS/SDSs are documents provided by the manufacturer that details the potential hazards and protection measures for a chemical or product. Similar products may vary from manufacturer to manufacturer so be sure to read container labels and, if you want more information, call Environmental Health and Safety (509-963-2338) to obtain the MSDS/SDS specific to the product.

**What is hazardous?**

A hazardous chemical is one that can cause physical harm or health problems. A hazardous chemical can be flammable, toxic, corrosive, or react with other chemicals.

**What is required if there are hazardous chemicals or products in my work area?**

1. A list must be made of all chemicals or products that are hazardous and kept or used in the work area.
2. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and/or Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for every listed chemical or product must be kept in a file or binder that is accessible to all employees at all times.
3. Employees must be told what information can be found on the MSDS/SDS.
4. All chemicals or products must be labeled as to the name of the product or chemical and the hazard that it poses. Original labels should always be left in place. If a product is put into a different container it must be labeled properly.
5. Training must be provided to employees about the hazardous chemicals or products and where they can find information about these hazards.
6. Supervisors will provide Hazard Communication training at initial job assignments and whenever a new chemical product with hazardous characteristics is introduced into employees’ work area.
Are there hazardous chemicals or products used in an office setting?
Most products used within an office-setting fall under the retail products or manufactured items that remain intact exemption to the Hazard Communication Standard. The exemption states:

*Retail products used in offices in the same manner and frequency used by consumers, can be termed “consumer products”, and include things such as correction fluid, glass cleaner, and dishwashing liquid.*

This exemption also covers manufactured items that remain intact such as enclosed toner cartridges, ink cartridges, etc.

If most office products fall under these exemptions, why do I have to know about the Hazard Communication Standard?
It is important that employees know that CWU has a written Hazard Communication Program and that Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for hazardous chemicals or products are made available to employees. It is also important that employees realize that products should be kept in their original container with original labels. If a product must be transferred to another container it must be labeled with the product’s name and hazard.

What are Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs)?
An MSDS/SDS is a document that is prepared by the manufacturer of a chemical or product that gives specific information about that product. Information that can be found on an MSDS/SDS includes:

- Name of the product
- Name and address of manufacturer
- Hazardous chemicals in the product
- Physical/chemical characteristics
- Fire hazard data
- Reactivity data
- Health hazard data
- Safe handling and use information
- Control measures

Examples of chemicals found in an office environment are:

**Adhesives**
Some products like glues and rubber cement contain chemicals such as ethylene glycol and acetone that could present a hazard under certain conditions. Many adhesives are extremely flammable, may be irritating to the eyes on direct contact, and may cause drying and irritation with repeated and prolonged skin contact. Acute exposure to vapors may cause respiratory irritation. These products can be safely used if safety guidelines are followed: Keep away from heat, sparks, and open flame, prevent skin and eye contact, and use only in areas with normal room air circulation.

**Carbonless Copy Paper**
Some research indicates that measurable amounts of formaldehyde may be released from carbonless copy paper. Although below the permissible exposure limits, a few sensitive individuals may experience various symptoms including headaches, skin, eye or respiratory irritation. Improved room air circulation should eliminate any potential respiratory hazard. Avoid touching face and eyes while working with forms. After using carbonless copy paper wash hands with mild soap and apply hand lotion to keep skin from drying.

**Cleaners**
Office workers may have occasions to use cleaning products such as glass cleaner for copy machine glass, desktop cleaners, and typewriter element cleaner. Such cleaning products may contain small amounts of ammonia or isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) and should pose no particular hazard when used carefully as directed.
Correction Fluid
Correction fluid for typewritten copy contains small quantities of solvents that may be hazardous during uncontrolled exposure to large volumes. Acute exposure could lead to respiratory irritation and central nervous system disturbance. However, such over-exposure cannot occur under the normal use conditions of this product. It is considered non-hazardous when used as directed in an office or room with normal air circulation. Exposure of this product to open flame can produce small amounts of poison gases.

Copy/Duplication Products
Dry and liquid toners for photocopy machines contain chemicals such as carbon black and resins that are mildly toxic if acute exposure occurs, but present no health hazard under normal conditions of use. Prolonged breathing of copy machine toner powder or vapors may cause eye and respiratory irritation and should be avoided.

Some copy machine toners contain trinitrofluorenone, which is a suspect carcinogen. Many photocopy machines produce ozone and a byproduct of the copy process. This toxic gas, which has a sweet odor, can irritate eyes, nose, and throat. The best protection from health hazards associated with copy machine use is good ventilation.

Any machine copy/duplication process should be conducted in ventilated areas.

Inks and Inking Materials
Black mimeograph ink can be moderately toxic if swallowed but does not pose health hazards under normal conditions of use. Stamp pad inks are similar except that the blue, purple, brown, and green inks may produce eye irritation on contact. The chemicals in broad tip marker pens may produce flammable vapors and prolonged breathing of the vapors may cause irritation to mucous membranes, nausea, dizziness, and headache. Overexposure is not expected under normal conditions of use.

General precautions to follow are:

General First Aid Guidelines
Read the MSDS/SDS for detailed first aid information. In general, for skin contact, wash with soap and water, and for eye exposure, flush affected area with water for at least 15 minutes. If overexposure by inhalation occurs, remover the victim to fresh air, and if a hazardous chemical is swallowed, check the MSDS for first aid procedure. *If in doubt seek medical attention immediately.*

Protection
Employees can protect themselves by always reading container labels thoroughly before using an unfamiliar product. Under normal conditions of use none of these products is expected to produce adverse health effects. Normal conditions of use means using a product only as directed and in areas with normal room air circulation. For more detailed information on chemicals and chemical products, employees should consult the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) or Safety Data Sheet (SDS).

What do I do if I have a question about the hazards of a product used in my work area?
Contact the Environmental Health & Safety Department at extension 2338 for assistance.