



7

Tool Kit Item # 7

AUDITING YOUR WORKPLACE



7

Tool Kit Item #7

AUDITING YOUR WORKPLACE

If you work in a company in the City of Toronto, the Environmental Reporting and Disclosure Bylaw and the ChemTRAC program can provide valuable information about toxic pollutants in your workplace.

Under the Bylaw, thousands of companies in the City will publicly report their use and releases of 25 priority substances. Many of these can have serious health effects such as cancer or respiratory problems. This is as much a concern for you if you work for a company using these substances as it is for the surrounding neighbourhood. If you both work and live in the neighbourhood, then you have two good reasons to work towards pollution prevention. Workers will be the first to benefit from reductions brought about by the Bylaw. Here are some ways in which you can use the Bylaw and the City's ChemTRAC program to protect your health and the health of your co-workers.

CHECK WHETHER THE COMPANY YOU WORK FOR IS REPORTING TO CHEMTRAC

If you find your employer is a ChemTRAC reporting company, you will be able to consult the ChemTRAC database at www.toronto.ca/health/chemtrac/. **Tool Kit #3** provides an overview of the business sectors required to report to ChemTRAC and when. **Tool Kit #5** shows you how to look up a specific company name using the online ChemTRAC database. This will tell you which of the 25 priority chemicals are being used in your workplace and released into the air and in what volumes. You may want to keep a record of this information and see how it changes from year to year.

Another source of information about toxic chemicals used in your workplace is the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs). In Canada under the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), the law requires a Material Safety Data Sheet for most materials or products that are used in the workplace. You can read the MSDS sheets carefully to see if the ChemTRAC chemicals are used in your workplace possibly at levels below the reporting thresholds or if there are other chemicals of concern being used that could be replaced or reduced.

TAKE THIS INFORMATION TO YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE OR YOUR JOINT HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

You may want to discuss the information reported to ChemTRAC with your health and safety representative or your joint health and safety committee. If you work in a workplace with more than 5 employees and less than 20, you must have a health and safety representative, and if your workplace has 20 or more employees, you must have a joint health and safety committee. Under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, the committee must be made up equally of both worker and management representatives.

The health and safety representative or committee can look at the use of these chemicals and investigate ways in which they can be reduced or eliminated. In many cases, there are safer chemicals that can replace the ones being used. In fact, in British Columbia the

7

Occupational Health and Safety Act requires companies that are using carcinogens to look for safer alternatives. Substitutions or reductions for any of these 25 chemicals will make your workplace healthier and safer.

You might point out that it benefits the company to reduce these chemicals so that if neighbouring residents ask about the ChemTRAC chemicals, your company is already taking positive action. Another good reason for your company to reduce these chemicals is to avoid having to report them to the City. In other places where governments have required reporting of toxic chemicals, many companies have been so successful in reducing their use of these chemicals that they no longer have any to report.

If you work in a unionized workplace, contact your national health and safety representative and ask them to help you push your company to do something. Another opportunity to raise concerns about toxic chemicals might be during the collective bargaining process when health and safety issues are being negotiated. If you work in a non-unionized workplace, it will be more challenging to raise your concerns but stressing the benefits to both workers and companies may convince some employers.

KEEP A PERSONAL CHEMICAL EXPOSURE JOURNAL

A personal chemical exposure journal can be another important way to influence companies to reduce hazardous chemicals. The purpose of a journal is to provide a record of hazardous chemicals that you have come into contact with at work. There are many ChemTRAC chemicals that are known to cause cancer or that probably or possibly cause cancer (See [Tool Kit #2](#)). Others cause respiratory problems. This record of your work history can provide necessary information to doctors, union representatives and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) if you are seeking compensation for a work-related illness.

When you have found out which chemicals are being used, you can keep track of your exposure to these chemicals in a journal using the template provided here. Make sure you record the product name, supplier, date of the MSDS and the Chemical Abstract Service (CAS) number for every substance you are tracking. By identifying the most hazardous substances in your workplace and recording them, you can start a process to eliminate them or substitute for them with less harmful substances and processes. In some situations, the use of a specific substance is necessary to meet product specifications but in most cases, with more investigation, there are often other solutions such as elimination or substitutions to produce the same results. In the event that elimination or substitution are not possible options, then it is important to apply the **ALARA** principle, which states that exposures should be kept **As Low As Reasonably Achievable**. This can be achieved by completely enclosing processes and using strict engineering controls. Personal protective equipment should only be used as a last resort.

This template for a Personal Chemical Exposure Journal has been developed by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) and adapted for this Tool Kit. You can use it to record your exposure to hazardous chemicals in your workplace. You might also note what type of exposure you experienced – breathing or skin absorption. This record will be a powerful tool if a number of workers in your workplace keep these journals. Then you can show concrete evidence of your exposures and present a strong argument to your employer for reducing them. The CAW recommends that you keep these Journals in a safe place and tell your family members where you keep them in case of emergency.

PERSONAL CHEMICAL EXPOSURE *JOURNAL*

PERSONAL PROPERTY OF

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____

Cell: _____

Workplace: _____

Local Union: _____

Emergency Contact: _____

JOURNAL RECORD TIMELINE

Start Date: _____

End Date: _____

