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CIRCULAR TO PRINCIPALS AND BUSINESS MANAGERS OF CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN VICTORIA AND LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

Dangerous goods in science laboratories

MAIN POINTS

- WorkSafe is currently visiting schools and checking on the management of dangerous goods in school laboratories.
- 'Dangerous goods' are substances that may seriously harm people, property and the environment. They present an immediate risk because of their explosive, flammable, radioactive, toxic or corrosive properties. They are normally indicated by diamond-shaped labels on containers and classified according to nine different Classes.
- WorkSafe inspectors have the power to issue Improvement Notices for non-compliance with safety legislation.
- The main issues identified by Worksafe in relation to dangerous goods in science laboratories are:
 - retention of chemicals that are no longer used
 - poor storage arrangements, including:
 - the failure to segregate or separate incompatible substances that should not be stored near one another because of the risk of fire and chemical reactions
 - excess quantities of dangerous goods that are unlikely to be used in the foreseeable future
 - chemicals that are deteriorating, leaking, crystallising, etc.
 - chemical containers that are missing lids, labels, etc.
- A suitably trained person must be appointed to coordinate the management of chemicals in the school.
- If WorkSafe issues an Improvement Notice, it must be complied with in the required timeframe; **non-compliance may result in prosecution**. For assistance, contact the Industrial Relations Unit on 03 9267 0431.

CRITICAL DATES

- Improvement Notices must be complied with in the specified timeframe.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- To improve the legal compliance of dangerous goods in laboratories, principals are asked to ensure that:
 - laboratories are inspected to identify all chemicals stored there. Dangerous goods can be identified by checking their labels or their Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)
 - a list of dangerous goods is compiled, including the quantities on hand and which Class they belong to by checking their labels or MSDSs.
 - a chemical waste disposal company is arranged to remove:
 - obsolete chemicals that are no longer used
 - chemicals that are deteriorating, leaking, crystallising, etc.

- damaged containers and those that do not have labels or lids
- excess stock levels of chemicals that are not going to be used in the foreseeable future
- the safe storage and handling of dangerous goods is improved by ensuring that:
 - incompatible substances are segregated or stored separately
 - all chemicals are listed in a Hazardous Substances and Dangerous Goods Register
 - MSDSs are readily available for all chemical substances
 - all containers are clearly labelled
- a suitably trained person has been appointed to coordinate the management of chemicals. A suitably trained person should have knowledge of segregation methods, dangerous goods Classes (including hazards and risk-control methods) and the degree of danger each presents.
- If the school does not have a suitably trained person then arrangements including appropriate training should be put into place as soon as possible.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Additional information can be found on the following websites:
 - The CECV website www.cecv.catholic.edu.au under *Industrial Relations / Occupational Health & Safety*:
 - OHS guidelines, which provide an overview of [Hazardous Substances and Dangerous Goods](#)
 - template for a [Hazardous Substances and Dangerous Goods Register](#)
 - five-minute [Chemicals in Schools](#) OHS-awareness training video
 - the [Chemicals in Schools](#) training manual which supports the video with more in-depth material.
 - The WorkSafe website www.worksafe.vic.gov.au:
 - [Code of Practice for the Storage and Handling of Dangerous Goods](#).
 - [Recognising Dangerous Goods segregation chart](#)
 - information and guidance materials on [Dangerous Goods](#).
 - The Department of Education and Training website www.education.vic.gov.au:
 - information for government schools on [Chemical Management](#).

CONTACT/ENQUIRIES

- For all enquiries, please contact Mr Matthew Dunstan, OHS and WorkCover Coordinator, at Catholic Education Melbourne on 03 9267 0228 or via email mdunstan@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au.



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