

What is a Material Safety Data Sheet and what will it tell me?

A Material Safety Data Sheet or MSDS is a document produced by manufacturers or importers about hazardous substances or products. The MSDS contains important information including:

- a hazardous substance's product name
- the chemical and generic name of certain ingredients
- the chemical and physical properties of the hazardous substance
- health hazard information
- precautions for safe use and handling
- the manufacturer's or importer's name, Australian address and telephone number.

The format and content for MSDS in Australia is set out in the 'National Code of Practice for the Preparation of Material Safety Data Sheets' by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission.

MSDS have not been developed for consumers, and retailers are not required to distribute them. However, if a hazardous substance is purchased from a retailer, and the substance is for use in a workplace, an MSDS can be requested from the manufacturer or importer.

While MSDS are principally a work place safety tool, they can also be helpful to consumers because they have more detailed information than labels about the chemical composition of a product. Manufacturers are often happy to send you an MSDS for their products. Where can I get more information?

The US National Institutes of Health has an extensive Household Products Database, which contains detailed free information on products, ingredients and MSDS. The database is searchable by chemical name and CAS Registry number (a global identification system for chemicals) making it useful for Australians as well.

Search the Household Products Database to find out what's in your products
<http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/index.htm>