



March 25, 2020

## **Don't Forget Hazard Communication During COVID-19 Outbreak**

The shortages of cleaners and sanitizers can be frustrating for leaders and workers of public employers. The Office of the Safety Director has heard stories of employees bringing in home-made cleaners, herbal cleaners, mixing two or more different cleaners, or 'spiking' cleaners, all in a good faith attempt to help. However, all of these actions can lead to problems. This is part of the reason OSHA created the Hazard Communication Standard; to allow employers to control, and make employees aware of, the chemicals and their hazards in their workplace. Employers should take this opportunity to remind their employees of the policies and procedures for bringing chemicals, including cleaners and sanitizers, into the workplace. The Safety Director recommends the Safety Briefing below be reviewed with employees at the first opportunity.

### **DON'T FORGET HAZARD COMMUNICATION DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

I want to tell you a couple of stories our JIF passed along:

- An employee made a 90% bleach solution instead of the recommended 10% solution because if a little bleach is good, more bleach is better. The spray bottle was left out for anyone to use with no label.
- In another town an employee mixed bleach and ammonia because some germs are killed better with bleach and other germs are killed better with ammonia, so using both should ensure killing the virus.

It is understandable in these unique times that people want to protect themselves and others. However, the rules of chemical safety do not change during a pandemic or even shortages. Both of the above examples of good intentions could lead to harm to themselves or others, the very people they were trying to help. A strong bleach solution kills the same number of pathogens as a 10% solution but adds an eye and skin irritant hazard. Mixing ammonia and bleach produces poisonous chlorine gas into the air. I just want to review our policies and procedures for buying, bringing in, or using cleaners and sanitizers:

1. All cleaners and sanitizers must be purchased through normal channels. The CDC recommends using normal household cleaners for most surfaces. A 10% bleach solution is a highly effective disinfectant. For surfaces that have been contaminated or potentially contaminated by a person known or suspected to be infected with the coronavirus, the CDC recommends using any EPA-registered household disinfectants. ALWAYS follow the directions on the label.
2. Wear the appropriate gloves and safety glasses in accordance with the label.
3. NJPEOSH and this agency prohibit employees from bringing into the workplace any personal cleaners without prior approval from **WHO**.
4. Do not mix or add extra ingredients to cleaners
5. If you put the cleaner into a secondary container, make sure you label it properly. Ask if you are unsure.
6. Managers – considering the time we are in, we recommended you post copies of the Safety Data Sheets for the cleaners and sanitizers used in your department. If you need a copy, contact our Right-to-Know Coordinator, **WHO**.

The MEL has additional COVID -19 information on their website, [www.njmel.org](http://www.njmel.org). Are there any questions?

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.