

How To Read a Chemical Label

The OSHA Hazard Communication Standard requires that all chemicals in the workplace be labeled. The information must include the name of the chemical and warnings about any hazards the material may present. Various labeling systems are used to meet this requirement. One such system is the U.S. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) system.

Although NFPA labels look rather simplistic, they hold a lot of information. For example, NFPA labels are color-coded. Each color on the label represents a different type of hazard, as shown below. The numbers inside the colors indicate the degree of a particular hazard.

Example



What the Colors Mean

Blue = Health hazard =

Red = Fire hazard =

Yellow = Reactivity hazard =

White = Special hazard =

What the Numbers Mean

0 = Minimal hazard =

1 = Slight hazard =

2 = Moderate hazard =

3 = Serious hazard =

4 = Severe hazard

Hazard-Specific Meanings

Blue Section: Health Risks	4	Poses a severe health risk if not handled safely. = Could cause death or irreversible injury. =	
	3	Could cause serious temporary or irreversible injury. =	
	2	Could cause temporary incapacitation. =	
	1	Could cause irritation. =	
	0	There is no health hazard. =	
Red Section: Fire Risks	4	A flammable vapor or gas that burns readily. =	
	3	A flammable liquid or solid that can be readily ignited. =	
	2	Must be heated for ignition. =	
	1	Must be preheated before ignition can occur. =	
	0	There is no fire hazard. =	
Yellow Section: Reactivity Risks	4	Capable of detonation or explosive reaction. =	
	3	May detonate when exposed to heat or an ignition source. =	
	2	Is readily capable of non-explosive reaction. =	
	1	May become unstable at high temperatures. =	
	0	The substance is stable. =	
White Section: Special Hazards	OX = Oxidizer =  =	Use no water =  =	Radioactive =  =
	ACID = Acid =		
	ALK = Alkali =		
	COR = Corrosive =		