

August 2025

Hazardous substance signage

KEY FACTS

If you have hazardous substances in your workplace over specific amounts, or carry out certain activities, you must display signs. The signs are to let workers, other people in the workplace and emergency service workers know the substances are there and to inform them of the associated hazards.

Make sure signs give people the information they need about the substances before they get too close to them. Generally:

- if the substances are in a dedicated room, put a sign outside the room
- if the substances are in a building, but not in a dedicated room in that building, put a sign at every entrance to your land
- if the substances are outside, put a sign immediately next to the storage area.

Signs must be visible in different weather conditions.

Signs must be easy to understand.

Make sure your signs say what they need to say – generally this is:

- that hazardous substances are present
- the general type of hazard of each substance present
- the first response in an emergency.

If the substances in your workplace change, think about whether you need to change your signs too.

Note: Additional signage rules apply for operations involving VTAs and fumigants.

Introduction

Signs help keep workplaces, workers and other people safe where hazardous substances are used, handled, manufactured or stored. They let workers, emergency service workers and visitors know which hazardous substances are in the workplace, the hazards associated with them, and the first actions to take in an emergency.

You must display signs if you are storing hazardous substances in your workplace over specific amounts. To check if you need signs, enter your substances and the amounts you have into the *Hazardous Substances Calculator* (the Calculator) available at: www.hazardoussubstances.govt.nz

The content and location of signs depend on the workplace, substances and type of storage. This guide helps you check that your signs tell people what they need to know and that your workers understand them. It describes the content required on signs for different types of substances and storage areas.

‘You’ – the PCBU

This guide is written for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) as they have a duty to display signs in workplaces that use, handle, manufacture or store hazardous substances. In this guide, ‘you’ means the PCBU.

In simple terms, a PCBU is an individual or a company carrying on a business, but it can also be other types of organisation. More information on the PCBU and other duty holders in the workplace and their duties is available on our website: worksafe.govt.nz

General duty to display signs

You must display signs whenever you store hazardous substances over a specified amount (threshold) in your workplace.

Use the Calculator or see [Schedule 3](#) of the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations 2017 (the Regulations) to find out the thresholds for your substances.

The content of these signs depends on whether the hazardous substances are in a building or in a room or compartment inside the building.

All the sample signs included below are examples of the **MINIMUM CONTENT** for signs as specified in the Regulations **ONLY**.

Generally, signs supplied by signage suppliers will contain all of the required content, plus other additional warnings and information.

You do not need to display signs when you store class 6.1A, 6.1B, 6.1C or 6.1D VTAs or agrichemicals outdoors at a temporary storage site, such as a temporary site for handling field bait or for loading aircraft.

Put the right signs in the right place

Signs must be able to be seen and understood.

Signs must also have the correct information for your workplace and the substances you have there.

In general, signs from safety equipment suppliers should meet the requirements in this guide, but you also have a duty to make sure that signs contain the information that they are required to display.

Make sure your signs can be understood, are clear, and stand up to the elements

This means making sure signs:

- are in English and readily understandable (see below)
- do not use abbreviations and acronyms unless people commonly understand them and you use the term in full at least once on the sign
- make all required information clearly visible and legible at a distance from no less than 10m in varying conditions (for example, in the rain or changing light)
- are made of durable materials that are resistant to sunlight and require minimal maintenance.

Are your signs readily understandable?

You must make sure that the people who are likely to read the signs can understand them. Think about whether the signs:

- give people the information they need quickly and easily
- display the information without clutter or unnecessary information.

If you think workers may not understand your signs, give them additional training by:

- explaining the signs that they will see in your workplace and their content, such as:
 - the pictograms¹ they are likely to see and what they mean
 - the precautionary statements and what they mean
- asking them to think about when they could need to use the emergency contact information.

Where do you need to display signs?

Your signs need to be near the substances, but not too close, because people need to know about the danger before it's too late. Don't put signs:

- where objects may hide or cover them
- beside doors or gates that could cover them when open
- above doors
- where smoke could conceal them.

If you are not sure signs are in the right place, look around the places where you store hazardous substances (for example, storage cabinets, dedicated storage areas). Make it as easy as possible for workers and emergency service workers to know about the hazards.

In the explanation for each specific type of sign below there is more information about where to display signs, but as a general rule if hazardous substances are:

- in a room, put a sign at the entrance to the room
- in a building, put a sign at every entrance to the building
- in a building on your land, put a sign at every entrance to the land
- outdoors, put a sign immediately next to the storage area.

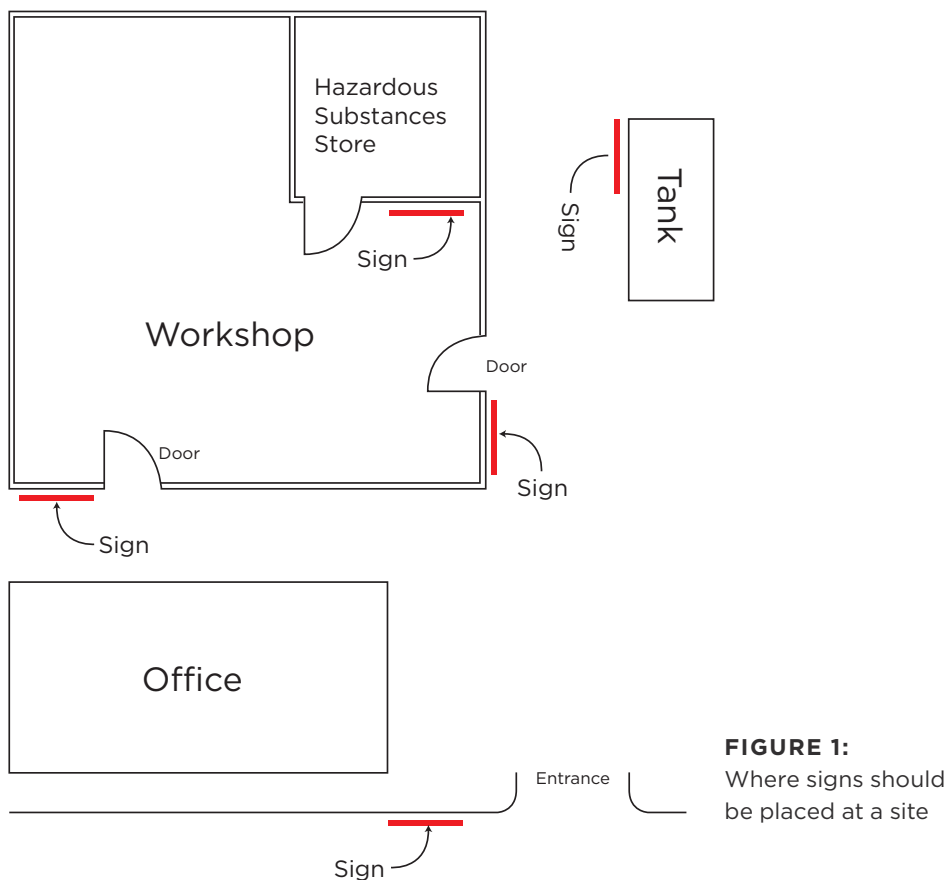


FIGURE 1:
Where signs should be placed at a site

There is more detailed information about where to place the signs for different substances and storage locations further on in this guide.

¹ DG or GHS pictograms can be used for signs.

Where can you get signs?

Safety equipment suppliers can provide you with the right signs.

Check the Yellow Pages or the internet for safety equipment suppliers in your area.

Maintaining signs

Because signs let workers and other people inside and outside the workplace know about the substances and risks inside a workplace, you must make sure the information on signs is clear and correct. This means:

- changing signs as soon as possible when the type, class or quantity of hazardous substances at your workplace changes and this change affects the information you need to display on your signs
- making sure that signs are clean, in good repair and not covered or obscured.

What's on storage signs?

Signs present information about substances that people need to keep themselves and others safe and respond to emergencies.

Signs for substances in buildings

If you have hazardous substances above the threshold for displaying signs in a building (but not a dedicated room or compartment in that building), your signs must state:

- that hazardous substances are present
- the general type of hazard of each hazardous substance present
- the immediate emergency response action – the first action in an emergency.

You must display your signs at every vehicular and pedestrian entrance:

- to the building
- to the land where the building is located.



FIGURE 2: Sample sign for substances in a building (but not a dedicated room/compartment)

If you store class 1 hazardous substances (except fireworks and safety ammunition) in a building (but not a dedicated room or compartment in the building), you must also display signs at each approach to the building in your property that emergency services could use.

Signs for substances in a dedicated room or compartment in a building, or in an outdoor area

When you store your hazardous substances in a dedicated room or compartment in a building or an outdoor area at your workplace, your signs must include:

- a warning that hazardous substances are present – use the word 'HAZCHEM' for class 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 or 9 substances or 'EXPLOSIVES' for class 1 substances
- the general type of hazard of each substance – use hazard pictograms² or hazard statements reflecting the classification of the substance
- the immediate response action to take in an emergency involving the substances.

² DG or GHS pictograms can be used for signs.

The signs must also include precautionary statements to prevent:

- unintended explosion for explosives (for example, 'explosion risk in case of fire'; 'avoid shock')
- unintended ignition of the substance for flammables (for example, 'no smoking'; 'no naked flames')
- unintended combustion, acceleration of fires, or thermal decomposition for oxidisers or organic peroxides (for example, 'keep away from sparks'; 'avoid shock').

You must display your signs:

- at each entrance to the room or compartment
- immediately next to the outdoor area.

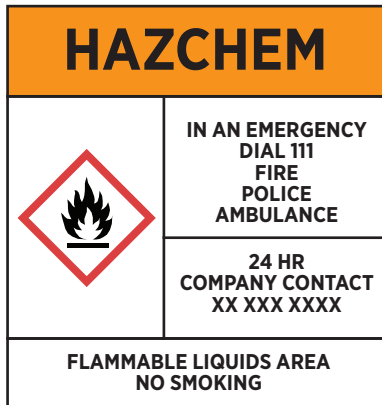


FIGURE 3:
Sample sign for substances in a dedicated room or compartment or outdoors

For all signs – the immediate emergency response action

This is the first action to take in an emergency:

- For explosives, the response action could be 'in an emergency, EVACUATE'.
- For flammable, oxidising, toxic or corrosive substances, the response action is generally to contact emergency services (ie in an emergency, dial 111 for Fire, Police, Ambulance).

If you store flammables, oxidisers, toxics or corrosives in bulk, the emergency response action could be represented by the **HAZCHEM** code.

The HAZCHEM code is used on signs and on containers for transporting hazardous substances and bulk storage containers so emergency service workers know which equipment to use in an emergency.

An example of a HAZCHEM code is '3YE':

- '3' recommends firefighters use foam.
- 'Y' means the substance must not enter waterways and recommends breathing apparatus when fighting a fire involving this substance.
- 'E' means emergency responders should consider evacuating occupants or residents of surrounding buildings in built-up areas.

Specific substances and locations

Transit depots

Transit depots have specific signage because the substances they hold vary and remain in closed containers. For transit depots, your signs must:

- contain the word HAZCHEM
- identify the site as a transit depot
- warn people that hazardous substances may be present.

You must display your signs at every vehicular and pedestrian entrance to the land where the transit depot is located.



FIGURE 4:
Sample sign for transit depot

Fireworks and safety ammunition

If you store fireworks or safety ammunition in a building at a workplace (but not in a dedicated room or compartment in the building), your signs must:

- warn that fireworks or safety ammunition are present
- state the general type of hazard using pictograms³ or hazard statements
- indicate the classification of the substances inside the building
- indicate the immediate response action to take in an emergency.

You must display your signs at primary points of vehicular and pedestrian entry:

- to the building
- to the land where the building is located.



FIGURE 5:
Sample sign for fireworks and safety ammunition

Other substances and workplaces

INDOOR APPLICATION OF AGRICHEMICALS

If you apply an agrichemical indoors, for example in a greenhouse, your signs must:

- warn that a substance toxic to humans is being applied
- warn that entry is not permitted without personal protective equipment (PPE)
- identify the PCBU who has management or control of the area
- state the day the application commences and the time and date the REI ends.

You must display signs at every routine point of entry to the area from the start of the application until the end of the REI, and remove them no later than 72 hours after the end of the REI.

For a list of REIs, see the WorkSafe website: [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

³ DG or GHS pictograms can be used for signs.

OUTDOOR APPLICATION OF VERTEBRATE TOXIC AGENTS (VTAS)

If you apply or lay a class 6.1A, 6.1B or 6.1C VTA outdoors in bait form to kill or control pests, or apply or lay any other class 6 VTA in a workplace where the public has access, you must display signs that state:

- the job title of the person in control of applying or laying the substance
- contact details for that person during normal business hours
- the substance name and a warning that it is toxic to humans and ecotoxic to vertebrates
- the date(s) the substance is going to be applied or laid.

It is also recommended that the following information is included on the sign:

- an identifying photo or description of the substance as it would be found in the environment
- emergency actions in the case of accidental ingestion.

The signs must meet the same comprehensibility and clarity requirements as the other types of signs, but the information on the person in control of applying or laying the substance and the date(s) the substance is going to be applied or laid only need to be visible from 2m. All other information will need to be readable from a distance of 10m.

See Appendix 1 for a sample VTA sign template.

You must display the signs at every normal point of entry to the area where you are applying or laying the substance.

Depending on the substance, WorkSafe can specify how long you need to display the sign, otherwise signs need to be displayed until the substance has been removed from the place it was applied or it is no longer toxic.

For a list of signage time periods see the WorkSafe website: [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

FUMIGANTS

You must display signs when you fumigate using class 6.1A, 6.1B, 6.1C fumigants. Depending on the type and location of fumigation, your signs must:

- warn people the area is being fumigated, stating the name of the fumigant and that it is toxic to humans
- describe the general type of hazard
- state precautions to prevent unintended ignition for flammable fumigants
- identify the PCBU who is directing the fumigation and provide contact details for that person during business hours
- state the date fumigation will start
- state actions to be taken in emergency
- be illuminated at night.

Depending on the type and location of the fumigation, you must place your signs:

- at every entrance to the area where you will fumigate
- at the perimeter of the risk area able to be seen by anyone approaching it
- at each entrance to the room or compartment if you fumigate in a room or compartment in a building or other enclosed space.

You must remove the signs immediately after fumigation.

The signage requirements for specific fumigants or types of fumigation may be modified by WorkSafe by means of a safe work instrument.


WARNING POISON

This building is being fumigated using: (fumigant) _____ _____
This fumigant is toxic to people and animals. Person directing fumigation: _____ Daytime phone number: _____ APPLIED ON: (enter date) _____
NO SMOKING IN AN EMERGENCY, DIAL 111 IMMEDIATELY

FIGURE 6:
Sample sign for fumigants

INDOOR STORAGE OF LPG, PROPANE, BUTANE AND ISOBUTANE

You must display signs if you store more than 50kg of LPG, propane, butane or isobutane in a building. This threshold is lower than when these substances are stored in other locations.

You must also display signs if you have any quantity of these substances, or other flammable gas refrigerant, in an integral part of a refrigeration system contained in a machinery room.

In any other case, the normal signage thresholds for these substances apply.

Follow the applicable rules about sign content and location for hazardous substances in buildings or in dedicated rooms or compartments inside buildings.

ANHYDROUS AMMONIA

The Regulations do not require signage for ammonia contained within refrigeration plant. However, it's best practice always to have them as they warn other people at the workplace and emergency services that hazardous substances are present. Emergency services use signs to plan their response and select appropriate PPE

FUELS (E10 AND E85, PETROL, OR DIESEL)

There are different visibility and legibility rules for signs for ethanol and gasoline fuel mixtures like E10 and E85, or petrol or diesel, because they are usually stored in places like petrol stations.

If they are being stored for refuelling vehicles belonging to the general public, signs only need to be clearly visible and legible at the point of refuelling, not from 10m from the substance.

MILKING ANIMALS

If your hazardous substances are teat sanitising products or dairy maintenance compounds in a building where you milk animals, you must display a sign at the primary vehicular or pedestrian entrance to the building.

Further information

The following resources are available at: www.hazardoussubstances.govt.nz

The *Hazardous Substances Calculator*, where you can enter the hazardous substances in your workplace to see the controls you have to put in place, including signage.

Your Practical Guide to working safely with hazardous substances.

Abbreviations

TERM	DEFINITION
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PCBU	Person conducting a business or undertaking
REI	Restricted entry interval
VTA	Vertebrate toxic agent

Appendix 1: Sample template for VTA signage



DANGER POISON

Photo or
description of
substance form and
presentation (optional)

(NAME OF SUBSTANCE) TOXIC to HUMANS and ANIMALS

Will be present (on the ground/in bait stations)

from (date)

Emergency information
(accidental ingestion)
if not printed on bait
stations or bags (optional)

- **WATCH CHILDREN at all times**
- **DO NOT EAT animals from this area** (delete for cyanide)
- **Poison baits and carcasses of animals are DEADLY to DOGS**

Organisation logo
(optional)

For more information, contact:

(insert position and business contact details of person in control of application)

Unauthorised removal of signs or baits is an offence