

Recognizing a Hazmat Shipment

Hazardous materials are given that designation because they pose a threat to health and safety or property during transportation. To minimize the risk of danger, you must be able to recognize hazardous materials in a shipment and handle them appropriately.

Hazardous materials shipments must be clearly identified. Knowing how to read the labels, markings and paperwork that identify the shipments is the first step in safe transportation.

Hazard Classes

For your purposes, the specific name of hazardous material may not be important. What you want to know is what risk it poses.

The Department of Transportation divides hazardous materials into 22 categories that identify their dangers. These hazard classifications tell you what can happen with the cargo and alert you to the need to follow the regulations for safe handling.

The 22 DOT hazard classes are:

- Explosives: Class A, B and C
- Blasting Agents
- Compressed Gases (Flammable/Non-Flammable)
- Flammable Liquid
- Flammable Solid
- Oxidizing Material
- Organic Peroxide
- Poisonous Gas or Liquid: Class A, B or C
- Irritating Material
- Etiologic Agent
- Corrosive Material
- Combustible Liquid

- Radioactive Material
- Other Regulated Material: ORM-A, ORM-B, ORM-C, ORM-D, ORM-E

Important Steps

Read the shipping papers to determine whether there are hazardous materials in the shipment. Look for warning labels on the containers you load. Examine the package markings for other clues and warnings.



Shipping Papers

Shipping papers must accompany all HazMat shipments. If there are hazardous materials in the shipment, they must be readily identifiable on the shipping papers. They must be listed first, written in a different color ink from other shipments, or marked with an X in the "HM" column.

If the material is a hazardous substance, the letter "RQ" indicating that the shipment contains a "reportable quantity" of

the substance, must be entered before or after the basic entry or in the "HM" column.

It is the shipper's responsibility to fill out the shipping papers. Carriers should not accept shipments without the proper documentation.

Warning Labels

HazMat warning labels are 4-inch by 4-inch diamond shaped signs indicating the hazard class of a shipment. They include a graphic representation of the hazard and the hazard name. (On tanks, a four-digit identification number may take the place of the hazard wording.)

The shipping papers and the labels must match. Shippers are responsible for affixing labels to HazMat cargo. Carriers should not accept shipments without the required labels.

Package Markings

In addition to the labels designating the hazard class (such as Flammable liquid), packages of 110 gallons or less containing hazardous materials are marked with the proper shipping name and the UN/NA identification of the hazardous material (for example, Acetone UN1090). Other markings may also be required.

Identification is Key

Identifying HazMat shipments and understanding their risks is crucial to transporting them safely. Shipping papers, warning labels and package markings provide the information you need to recognize a hazardous material.