

CHEMICAL SAFETY FOR FOOD SERVICE WORKERS

(For assistance, please contact EHS at (402) 472-4925, or visit our web site at <http://ehs.unl.edu/>)

Food service workers often use chemicals during their workday. Provided below are safe handling tips for common cleaning agents used in kitchens. Be sure to follow all additional safety precautions provided by your supervisor, during training, or on applicable Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) or chemical labels.

General Guidance

- Most kitchen cleaning products are skin and eye irritants. To protect the skin and eyes, use protective gloves and goggles. Protective gloves vary in their protection against various chemicals, depending on the material of construction. Heavy, dishwashing type gloves are usually suitable in minimal contact situations (e.g., not immersion of the hands). Some people are allergic to latex gloves. Gloves constructed of Nitrile do not pose an allergy hazard.
- Read the Material Safety Data Sheets for all products you use. Participate in chemical safety training.
- Read and follow label directions. Use the product only for its intended use and as instructed.
- Dilute as instructed.
- If sprayed, mists can irritate or damage the respiratory tract. Use only a light mist and direct it away from the face. In some cases, a respirator may be necessary. This is especially true if working in a confined area with limited ventilation, using large quantities of material in a spray form, or if using sprays/mists over an extended period of time. In addition, conditions of application may also affect the volatility of the product. For example, products in contact with hot surfaces may release more vapors than when applied on cold surfaces.
- DO NOT MIX CLEANING PRODUCTS! For example, mixing ammonia with bleach produces toxic gas. Mixing acids and bases can generate heat and cause splattering.
- Some materials such as soaps can make surfaces quite slippery.

- Always wash hands and exposed areas of the skin with soap and water after handling or using chemicals. If a chemical enters the eye, continuously flush the eyes for 15 minutes and seek medical attention. Know ahead of time where and how you will flush your skin or eyes.

Specific Types of Products

- Oven cleaners contain sodium hydroxide, a strong base – wear long gloves, goggles, and a rubber apron.
- Descaling products contain phosphoric acid – wear gloves and goggles when mixing or applying these products.
- Metal polishers contain combustible or flammable materials – do not use these products near hot surfaces or open flames; use with good ventilation; wear gloves and eye protection.