

Are Your Signs and Labels Confusing?

The picture at the right, from the November 2012 “Find-the-Problem” Beacon contest, shows a group of pumps that look exactly the same. In the picture, they do not appear to be labeled in any visible way. If you were told that one of the pumps had been prepared for mechanical work, how could you be sure you were working on the right pump?



Lack of labeling can be a safety problem, and poor or confusing labels or information signs can be even worse. The pictures below are examples of confusing labels and signs taken from process plants and everyday life. Do you have confusing signs or labels in your plant?

What Can You Do?

- Look for unlabeled equipment, missing labels, or damaged labels that you cannot read. Repair the labels if you are able to do so, or report it to somebody who can fix the problem.
- Look for confusing labels or signs, like some of those in the pictures, and have them fixed.
- Make sure that the labeling and identification of equipment in the plant is the same as the identification used in operating procedures, maintenance procedures, emergency procedures, and other plant documents.
- Don't create confusion by modifying labels using handwritten notes or other temporary labels. If a label needs to be corrected, use a proper label, and consider doing a management-of-change review.
- Be consistent in using names or acronyms for chemicals in your plant. For example, MMA can mean methyl methacrylate in one plant, monomethylamine in a different plant, and perhaps something completely different in another plant. Always use the correct chemical name for a material. Be sure that everybody in your plant knows what the labels mean.



◀ Similar labels on these pipes contributed to unloading the wrong material into a storage tank. A chemical reaction resulted, releasing a toxic gas that injured 6 people. See the April 2012 Beacon.

Use clear labels and signs for safety!

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