



To: Bargaining Unit Presidents

From: Vicki McKenna, RN, President

Date: May 22, 2020

Re: **Alert – Substitution of Technical Grade Ethanol in Hand Sanitizer**

C: Local Coordinators, Board of Directors, Health and Safety Reps

It has come to our attention that, due to supply issues, some manufacturers are substituting food grade ethanol with technical grade ethanol in some hand sanitizers.

Health Canada has issued a time limited approval to use technical grade ethanol while supply shortages of the higher-grade ethanol exist. However, because it contains toxicological properties including carcinogenicity, Health Canada has required that manufacturers notify all customers that technical grade ethanol is in the product and to label the containers with the following warnings: “Do not use on broken or damaged skin. Do not use if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Do not inhale.”

To date, ONA is aware of four employers – all hospitals – who were using hand sanitizer with technical grade ethanol. In almost all of the instances, ONA representatives only became aware of the issue when workers reported a new smell in the hand sanitizer to their ONA representative and Employer. In all four cases, the Employer took action once it was reported by replacing the hand sanitizer with a product that does not contain this harmful substance. While the immediate hazard was resolved in these circumstances, products containing technical grade ethanol may be used in other workplaces. In addition, supply issues may result in similar situations occurring related to other cleaning products and/or personal protective equipment (PPE).

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA) requires that employers ensure that their products are safe, that the Safety Data Sheets are available (s.25 (2) a,d,h), that workers are informed about all hazard information related to products, and that products are labeled (WHMIS Regulation 860 s.6-8). They also have a duty to consult their JHSC whenever new measures and procedures are being developed, established and put into effect (Health Care Residential Facilities Regulation, s.8-9). The JHSC also has the power to identify hazards to workers and make recommendations to the Employer for the improvement of health and safety of workers [s.18 (a,b,d)].

Your Labour Relations Officer will be contacting you so that you can alert your Employer of this issue, confirm that they are not using any hand sanitizer products containing technical grade ethanol and review the safety data sheets to confirm. If the employer is found to be using such hand sanitizer, we suggest the calling of an emergency JHSC meeting. If still unresolved then the Ministry of Labour should be called.

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