

Chemical Safety on the Golf Course: How to Protect Your Employees and Guests



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Introduction

While they keep your pool glistening, your buildings pristine, and your turf in top shape, chemicals can be harmful to your staff and guests without the proper precautions in place. Fires and property damage, personal injuries and workers' compensation claims, not to mention a host of pollution issues, are all possible results of chemical accidents or misuse.

When it comes to chemicals, it's important to take a proactive approach to controlling your risk. If you take the time now to ensure proper chemical storage and usage, you can protect your club from dangerous—and costly—exposure in the future.

It Starts With Training

Training your staff on proper handling of hazardous chemicals is not just good business—it's the law. [OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard \(HCS\)](#) requires you to make information about hazardous chemicals available and understandable. Safety data sheets (SDSs) are required to be obtained for any hazardous materials and displayed in visible locations. But you should go beyond the basics and train your employees on the potential health hazards involved and how to prevent them. Each new employee should be required to take a hazardous material training course, and seasoned staff should take an annual refresher course.

Most importantly, make sure golf maintenance and ground operations personnel follow all local, state, and federal compliance programs.

There are four primary areas in which your club may use potentially hazardous chemicals: in the kitchen, for general cleaning and property maintenance, for the pool, and on the golf course itself. Let's take a closer look at each and examine some ways you can control your risk.

Chemicals in the Kitchen

Most commercial kitchens use chemicals for cleaning, sanitizing, and pest control. Beyond requiring your kitchen staff to take state-mandated food safety courses, your entire staff should be aware of proper handling and storage of kitchen chemicals. Here are some guidelines to remember:

- Use and store chemicals away from food preparation and storage areas
- Make sure all chemicals are labeled correctly
- Always follow label and manufacturer's instructions for chemical use
- Never mix chemicals together or reuse a chemical container
- Don't place spilled chemicals back into the container

Chemicals for Cleaning and Property Maintenance

The chemicals your maintenance and janitorial crews use to keep your club's buildings clean and sanitized also pose risks. Cleaning chemicals can cause anything from skin rashes to asthma. In addition to following the same guidelines listed above, here are some other ways to help keep your employees safe:

- Switch to green cleaning products that are less hazardous to workers and the environment, when possible

- Make sure staff members know which cleaning chemicals must be diluted and how to do so correctly and safely
- Train employees on emergency spill procedures for cleaning chemicals
- Employees should use gloves, goggles, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) when appropriate
- Cleaning chemicals should not be used to wash hands; hands should be washed with appropriate hand soap
- Modern equipment and tools—such as microfiber cloths, HEPA-filtered vacuums, and hands-free mops—can help you reduce your overall use of chemicals
- Place walk-off mats inside and outside entryways to help keep floors clean without chemicals

Chemicals for the Pool

Chemicals added to your club's pool help protect swimmers from germs, improve water quality, protect your pool equipment, and prevent algae growth. But if they're used incorrectly, they can harm your staff and swimmers. Here are some ways to ensure pool chemicals are used safely:

- Designate a pool chemical storage area away from other chemical storage and with adequate lighting and ventilation
- Store chemicals in original containers, away from moisture, extreme temperatures, fire hazards, and food
- Train all staff in pool chemical safety but only allow designated and trained aquatics staff to handle pool chemicals
- Make sure PPE, SDSs, and first aid supplies are always available and accessible
- Develop and practice an emergency response plan for accidental chemical spills or exposure

Chemicals for the Golf Course

Properly storing and using pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, and other chemicals is key to keeping employees and guests safe, and keeping your turf in pristine condition. Here are some steps to consider for safer golf course chemical storage and usage (your staff training should also cover these techniques):

- Make sure you have the appropriate number of licensed and state-certified golf course maintenance personnel on staff
- Pay special attention to storage, mixing, and disposal of pesticides and fertilizers
- Store and mix chemicals away from groundwater supplies, lakes, ponds, or rivers that could receive runoff from a spill or leak
- Try to limit your use of chemicals by paying attention to environmental factors affecting turf health, such as soil, insects, types of plants, proximity to water, and more
- Use products only as directed. You may think applying more of a product than recommended will increase its effectiveness, but that is often not the case
- Use the right spray equipment for the task, and make sure your equipment is well maintained and in good working order

- Do not spray your course on especially windy days
- Use granulated options that can be specifically placed, as opposed to sprayed, when possible
- Apply chemicals in early morning hours, long before the morning's first tee time
- Follow all labels and SDS instructions explicitly
- Post signs when chemical applications take place to ensure guests and golfers adhere to recommended waiting periods
- Keep detailed records of all chemical applications to trace the source of any possible incidents

Chemical Storage Tanks

If you store gas, diesel, pesticides, or herbicides in underground or above-ground storage tanks, there are additional considerations to be aware of to further mitigate your risk:

- Ensure tanks are maintained in accordance with local and federal requirements
- Above-ground tanks should be in a containment unit or diked so potential leakage is contained
- If a tank is exposed to traffic, install vehicle protection such as concrete-filled metal posts
- If you use underground storage tanks, make sure monitoring wells are in place
- Use appropriate signs indicating hazardous materials to help keep guests safe

Keeping Guests Safe From Chemical Exposure

In addition to the guidelines above, your chemicals should be stored in locked areas with limited access, far from where guests may wander. Clear and consistent communication with staff and guests can go a long way toward a safer environment.

If your staff is properly trained, your chemicals are properly stored, and you take care when applying them, you should not have to worry about exposing golfers or staff to hazardous chemicals.

Of course, you can't completely eliminate risk. Your insurance agent or broker can work with you to develop a golf course safety program that includes chemical storage, application, and use, and to ensure you have adequate coverage in place. For more information about managing risk at your club, talk to your VGM Insurance Account Manager or contact us today at info@vgminsurance.com or **800-362-3363**.

