

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

Risk Management and Safety Services

Standard Operating Procedure: EHS005-150825

Title: Managing Unknown or Unidentified Waste Procedure

Policy Statement

Occasionally a hazardous waste is “discovered” that is unlabeled and its history is untraceable. On other occasions the label has become deteriorated or damaged and is unreadable. Whatever the cause, when a waste material loses its identity the waste is designated an “unknown” and must be handled as though it possesses all of the hazard characteristics until demonstrated otherwise. In other words, the waste is assumed to be ignitable, corrosive, reactive and toxic.

In some cases a preliminary examination may be able to give the hazardous waste generator some clues as to the hazard characteristics of the waste but caution must be taken until a firm characteristic profile has been obtained.

The disposal of “unknown’s” is expensive and risky. The ideal situation is to make sure wastes do not lose their identity.

To prevent a hazardous material from becoming an unknown waste, it is prudent to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Check chemical inventories regularly for deteriorated labels or containers. Replace labels before they become unreadable.
- Rotate your inventory so that older materials are used first.
- Request a hazardous waste pickup for expired or unwanted chemicals.
- Clear out and request pickup for old “stashers” of chemicals that have not been used for long periods of time.
- **Never add waste to a container until a label has been affixed and all fields are filled out-this practice will ensure compliance with EPA regulations and avoid lost chemical identity.**

Unknown/Unidentified Hazardous Wastes

If you do discover an unidentified material and you suspect that it might be hazardous, contact Environmental Health and Safety at extension 3302. Do not attempt to move or handle the material unless you are sure that it is safe to do so. A hazardous materials technician will make the hazard/risk determination and a pickup will be arranged.