



## STYLE GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH DOCUMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Style for welding and cutting documents means two things: matter and manner, otherwise known as content and form or subject and format. Style refers not only to what is said, but also how it is stated and presented to the reader.

### BACKGROUND OF CURRENT STYLE

The recommended writing style evolves from precautionary labeling practices. It also arises from the obligation to users found in standards and codes, as well as from an industry-wide concern for the well-being of its customers. The text should **warn and instruct** the reader about the **normal use and reasonably foreseeable misuse and abuse** of a product or process. The instruction literature which accompanies a product, or process, is considered as part of that practice.

- The **warn** part of the requirement is met by a statement of the hazard and consequences of the failure to act as specified.
- The **instruct** part of the requirement is met by explaining how to avoid the hazard and consequences.

- It is not mandatory to have a particular order to the statements. It can be **warn and instruct** or **instruct and warn**. Either sequence is satisfactory, though **warn and instruct** is preferred.
- This order preference is based on current precautionary labeling practices which warn first and instruct second.
- For all safety and health information published by the American Welding Society, try to follow the **warn and instruct** requirements for the **normal use** as well as for the **foreseeable misuse and abuse** of the product or process.

### STYLE METHODS AND FEATURES

The matter and manner for welding and cutting documents have evolved with time. It is recommended that documents state the hazards and include the consequences as well as how to avoid them. The stylistic features are as follows:

- Use the active voice.
- Use strong, clear, action verbs in the imperative mood.
- Use short, direct sentences.

- Use a checklist. Do not skip any items. Omitting steps can cause personal injury or equipment damage.
- Use quality control procedures to meet intended performance requirements and to minimize costs.

## USE OF PRECAUTIONARY SIGNAL WORDS

There are three signal words used to identify the levels of hazard in ANSI Z535.4. These are: DANGER, WARNING, and CAUTION. Wherever possible, reserve these words for use on labels and collateral materials only. Avoid the use of signal words in prose. Use the word “precautionary” or other such words instead of signal words for text.

## FORMAT SUGGESTIONS

Several formats satisfy these requirements. The two of the most popular are:

- Put all information in one or two simple sentences.
- Use a hazard statement containing the precautionary statement (description of hazard and its consequences) followed by a list of simple instructions telling how to avoid the hazard. The following example is adapted from NEMA EW 6:

**WARNING:** ELECTRIC SHOCK can kill: FUMES AND GASES can be hazardous; ARC RAYS can injure eyes and burn skin.

- Do not touch live electrical parts.
- Keep your head out of the fumes.
- Wear dry insulating gloves and clothing.
- Use enough ventilation or exhaust at the arc to keep fumes and gases from your breathing zone, and the general area.
- Wear correct eye, ear, and body protection.
- Read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions, employer’s safety practices, and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs).

## SUMMARY

Read and understand all instructions, especially those containing safety or health information.

- Quickly get to the point to keep the reader’s attention and save time.
- Be clear, direct, and simple in communicating with the reader.
- Use easy-to-read short instructions.

## INFORMATION SOURCES

National Electrical Manufacturer’s Association (NEMA). *Guidelines For Precautionary Labeling For Arc Welding And Cutting Products*, Arc Welding Section (NEMA EW6). Published by the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, 1300 North 17th Street, Suite 1752, Rosslyn, Virginia 22209; telephone: (703) 841-3200; web site: [www.nema.org](http://www.nema.org).

National Electrical Manufacturer's Association (NEMA). *Manual For NEMA Standards Publications*, (NEMA NS1). Published by the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, 1300 North 17th Street, Suite 1752, Rosslyn, Virginia 22209; telephone: (703) 841-3200; web site: [www.nema.org](http://www.nema.org).

American National Standards Institute (ANSI). *Product Safety Signs And Labels* (ANSI Z535.4), available from ANSI, 25 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY 10036 (telephone: 212-642-4900; web site: [www.ansi.org](http://www.ansi.org)).

American National Standards Institute (ANSI). *Safety in Welding, Cutting, and Allied Processes* (ANSI Z49.1), published by the American Welding Society, 8669 NW 36 Street, #130, Miami, FL 33166; telephone 800-443-9353; web site: [www.aws.org](http://www.aws.org).