COSHH for café cleaning: briefing a new starter

A practical cleaning-chemical briefing connects the task to the approved product, controls and help available in the café.

Practical staff guidance; adapt the suggested workflow to your venue and current procedures.

Start at the cupboard

Show the employee where approved products are stored and how each is identified. Explain which tasks they are authorised to undertake and where the working instructions are kept. HSE highlights cleaning substances and skin exposure as relevant hospitality risks. The local assessment should translate that information into controls staff can follow.

Demonstrate the actual method

Use the product and equipment the employee will encounter on shift. Explain preparation, ventilation, handling, required protective equipment and disposal according to the assessment and manufacturer's instructions. Keep chemicals in suitable, clearly identified containers. Mixing products can create dangerous reactions; use only the specified method and obtain help when instructions are unclear.

Check understanding with a task

Ask the new starter to identify the right product for one task and point to the relevant instructions. Have them explain what they would do if a container had lost its label or the required equipment was missing. This exposes practical gaps that a simple "have you read it?" question can miss.

Make reporting straightforward

Show the reporting route for damaged containers, splashes, symptoms and unavailable controls. Record any tasks the person needs further demonstration or supervision to complete. Revisit the briefing after a product or method change. The briefing sheet supports the venue's COSHH arrangements; the assessment and task-specific controls remain the basis for work.

Worked example

Fictional example: a new cleaner finds a spray bottle with an unreadable label. They keep it out of use, contact the supervisor and use an identifiable approved product only once the correct instructions and equipment are available.

Your next steps

- Identify the task and product.
- Locate the assessment and instructions.
- Demonstrate the agreed controls.
- Ask the learner to explain the method.
- Record follow-up and change triggers.

Connect the assessment to the bottle in use

Place the actual product, label and local instruction together during the briefing. Ask the new starter to identify the task, required dilution or ready-to-use status, exposure controls, storage and response to a spill or accidental contact. A safety data sheet supplies information about a substance, while the workplace assessment considers how it is used in this job. Staff should know where to find both and who explains unclear instructions.

A practical teach-back

Fictional example: a new employee is given an unlabelled spray bottle and asked to clean a food-preparation surface. They should stop and identify the approved product and method through the responsible colleague. Decanting, labelling and storage must follow the business arrangement. During the teach-back, ask the learner to explain which PPE is selected, how they avoid contaminating food and when they would call for assistance. Do not invite them to guess a chemical concentration.

Can two products be mixed for a stronger effect?

Follow the manufacturer’s instructions and the assessed procedure. Mixing cleaning chemicals can create serious hazards. Never improvise a mixture or substitute a product merely because the original has run out.

Use a briefing record that captures decisions

A useful record identifies the product and task, the current instruction, the control measures, the person briefed and the check of understanding. Note any question that remains unresolved and who will answer it. If a replacement chemical arrives, compare the new instructions before continuing the old routine. Review dispensing equipment, storage and emergency arrangements as well as the label. A simple demonstration might ask the learner to locate the correct product, explain the approved dilution method and show where protection and spill instructions are kept. It should happen within the assessed safe procedure. A learner who cannot explain a critical step needs further instruction and support before undertaking it independently.

Plan the task around exposure

A product instruction should be read alongside the way the job is performed. Spraying above shoulder height, using a product in a confined area or working near exposed food can change the problem. The workplace assessment should address the actual use and the controls needed. Staff can contribute useful observations about awkward access, splashes and missing equipment. They should raise a change before improvising a new technique. The briefing should name who can review the method and how the task is managed while a question is unresolved.

Check the emergency information

Before the task, show where staff find the product information and how they summon assistance for a spill, exposure or illness. The response must follow the actual product and workplace instructions. Do not substitute a generic household remedy for those instructions. Staff should know what information to give when calling for help, including the product identity and what happened. Keep emergency access and equipment usable. A short tabletop question can reveal whether the team knows where the information is kept without deliberately exposing anyone to a chemical.

Review a replacement product properly

When supplies change, compare the application, required controls, dilution, contact time, storage and equipment compatibility. Check whether the written instruction and cleaning schedule still match. Brief the people who use the product and those who replenish or label containers. Record which version of the instruction was issued and what happened to old stock. A substitute selected only on price can change the practical method. Keep the decision with the person responsible for the assessment and purchasing arrangement, so staff receive one verified instruction instead of conflicting advice.

A cleaner finds two identical spray bottles. Which can they use?

At the start of a shift, two unlabelled bottles stand beside the sink. One colleague remembers filling a bottle yesterday but cannot identify which. The room needs cleaning before opening. What is the safe next step?

Compare your decision

Leave both out of use and alert the supervisor. Obtain an identifiable product covered by the venue’s cleaning instructions. Check the label, task controls and equipment before starting. Colour, smell and a colleague’s memory cannot establish the contents.

Ask the supervisor to show how decanted products are labelled and stored. The handover should identify who will deal with the unknown bottles and how the team will obtain the correct product next time.

Sources and editorial basis

- HSE — COSHH in catering
- HSE — Safe use of cleaning substances

Guidance checked on 19 October 2026. Examples and worksheets are original suggested workflows; adapt them to your operation.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details