Avoid Chemical Exposure

Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE
If you work with any amount of chemicals, or work in an environment where chemicals are used, handled, stored, transported or disposed of, you must understand the hazards and how to protect yourself. Paying attention to chemical safety training can save your life and the lives of others.

WHAT'S THE DANGER
The workplace chemicals you encounter may look innocent enough, and you may not see any ill effects from chemical exposure for many years. However, even when small amounts of chemicals are used, life-threatening situations can develop.

EXAMPLE
In a nursing home a worker poured a cleaning compound into an unlabeled bottle. A patient thought the substance was a beverage, drank it and died. In another instance, a soft drink bottle on a workbench contained a cleaning solvent, not a soda. The same worker who put it there had a close call when he almost drank it.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Learn how to read and use a material safety data sheet. An MSDS must be readily available for all chemicals used in the workplace. You need training to understand the chemical properties and hazards listed. An MSDS will also tell you how to protect yourself and what to do if something goes wrong.
- Learn how to read a chemical label. You need to learn the terminology and symbols related to chemical hazards.
- Become aware of chemical safety signage. Signs point out hazards, including stored flammable materials which must be kept away from sources of ignition.
- Wear and maintain the right protective apparel to prevent

contact with chemicals. Choosing and using gear made of the right materials is vital. If a respirator is required, it must be the right kind for the hazard, properly fitted and in good working order.

- Know what to do in an emergency. You must learn the location of safety showers and emergency eyewash stations in your work area so you can find them quickly, even if you are blinded by a chemical splash. Learn how to use this equipment before an emergency occurs.
- Find out what the hazards are for the chemicals in your work area by consulting the material safety data sheets and learn how to call for help quickly.

FINAL WORD

Pay attention to chemical safety training. Keep asking questions until you understand what you need to know.