California Laborer Dies After Inhaling Vapors

A 20-year-old laborer drowned in a bin filled with water after inhaling toxic fumes. The worker was standing on a 23-inch ladder using a high-pressure steam hose to clean glue from the bottom of a bin when he fell into the bin and drowned. No co-workers were nearby and it was more than an hour before he was discovered in the bin, which was overflowing with water.

The worker’s job was to clean bins filled with sealants, glues and adhesives ? all containing trichloroethane, a heavy, colorless substance that is highly toxic. He was not wearing a respirator and there were no safety devices (such as a safety belt or guardrail) to prevent him from falling from the ladder.

How can you prevent a similar incident? Make sure your workers:

- Wear a respirator when working with, or around, hazardous materials.
- Review and follow your company’s safety plan for working in confined spaces.
- Evaluate your work environment before you begin a task and do not continue with work that is unsafe.
- Wear fall protection, such as safety belts or lanyards when working at elevations.