Carbon Monoxide Fatality File

Worker dies from carbon monoxide poisoning while using pressure washer

On the day of the incident, a boat maintenance crew supervisor was overseeing a crew using a pressure washer and disc grinder to remove old paint from a boat. Crew members were working on the boat in different areas that were covered with plastic tarps to prevent paint chips from entering the water. The victim moved the pressure washer onto a side deck passageway that was fully enclosed by plastic tarps. He used the pressure washer for about 20 minutes. A co-worker later found him unconscious. The medical examiner reported the cause of death as “carbon monoxide intoxication due to inhalation of engine exhaust.”

To prevent similar occurrences:

- Ensure gasoline-powered pressure washers or other fuel-powered tools are not used in enclosed or partially enclosed areas.
- Instruct employees on the hazards, sources, symptoms and control of carbon monoxide exposure from fuel-powered equipment.
- Ensure personal carbon monoxide detectors equipped with audible alarms are used when employees are working with small gasoline-powered engines in locations where carbon monoxide may build up.
- Coordinate work activities at jobsites with multiple employees to ensure safe work.
- Ensure carbon monoxide safety warning labels are attached to pressure washers and replace the labels when they no longer are legible.
- Consider using alternatives to fuel-powered equipment and tools.