Face Facts About Flammables

Safety Talk

If your job includes the use or handling of flammable substances, you need special training to recognize and avoid the hazards that go along with them. Here are some basic pointers:

What are flammables?

Flammables frequently are common substances. Some are liquids, such as gasoline or alcohol, while others are gases, such as acetylene.

Why are flammables hazardous?

- Flammables can burn, release flammable vapors and explode under conditions that would be safe for other substances.
- Flammable gases and liquids burn at temperatures close to room temperature (below 100 F or 37.8 ? C).
- Flammables can be ignited easily by a spark, flame or other source of heat. A spark from static electricity can cause a flammable substance to burn or explode.

Facts about flammables include:

- Some flammables are liquids that evaporate rapidly. These are called “volatile.” The vapors (gases) given off by the liquid are what burns, not the liquid itself.
- Oxygen, while a fire hazard, is not a flammable gas. It’s an oxidizer, meaning it supplies the oxygen needed for a fire to burn. Pure oxygen supports rapid burning of another substance. Substances that may not easily burn can catch fire in a pure oxygen atmosphere.

What are some safeguards for flammables?

- Anyone who works with flammable substances needs training. Safe storage, proper ventilation, emergency procedures and

other valuable information is included in that training.

- Flammables must be stored safely. They should be kept in an approved covered container that is properly labeled and in an approved cabinet. Flammables must be kept in a well-ventilated place and away from all sources of ignition. As well, they must be kept away from reactive substances, which can explode, burn or release harmful vapors. Flammables must also be stored separately from oxygen and other oxidizers.
- Information on the safe use and storage is described in the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for each particular flammable substance. Before using a flammable, read the MSDS and follow the precautions. A shorter version of this information is on the container label.
- You should also know where to find and how to use the correct extinguisher for a fire involving flammables. Get training and practice before you need to use an extinguisher.

Flammable substances are found in many workplaces. Make sure you get the proper training to work with them safely.