Floor Buffer Safety Fatality File

Janitor Using Propane Buffer Killed by Carbon Monoxide

On November 13, 2004, a 50-year-old male janitor was found dead at a job site where he was cleaning floors with a propane buffer. OR-FACE received notification of the incident on November 29. This report is based on information obtained from OR-OSHA, law enforcement, and medical examiner reports.

The employer was a small business providing janitorial services. The business was registered as a corporation, employing nine people, including family members of the owner. Other workers were leased from a temporary employment agency as needed. The janitor had worked for the employer for 2½ weeks as a temporary employee. He was trained by another employee and had used the propane buffer on several other jobs prior to the incident. No training was offered on the hazards of carbon monoxide, or the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The buffer, a Pioneer Eclipse propane buffer, Model CV11ST, had been owned by the employer for about 3 years, and was serviced within the past year. The buffer is started by plugging it into an electrical outlet and is then powered by propane gas. The propane-powered buffer used in this incident produced high levels of carbon monoxide.

Recommendations

- Propane-powered equipment used indoors should be replaced with electric-powered equipment.
- Propane-powered equipment should only be used indoors when adequate ventilation and carbon-monoxide detectors and alarms are available.

- Equipment should be properly maintained in safe working condition.
- Employers should ensure a safe work environment for their employees, including temporary employees.

Cause of Death

Asphyxiation by inhalation of carbon monoxide and propane exhaust