Leave Chemical Hazards at Work

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

If you work with hazardous chemicals, then you´ve been trained on safe work practices to reduce your exposure. But have you ever considered the effects these chemicals might have on your family?

Of course, you wouldn’t dream of taking a drum of a toxic chemical home from work and allowing your family to be exposed to it. But if you carry chemical residue away from the workplace on your clothing, tools, skin or hair, you might be putting your family in similar danger.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

Asbestos, beryllium, lead, mercury, pesticides and infectious agents are some of the substances known to have been carried home by workers, putting families at risk for cancer, reproductive problems, learning disabilities, brain damage and other health problems.

Example

A recent study found that oil field workers who are exposed to?? pipe dope??a threading compound that often contains high amounts of lead and is hard to remove from clothing or skin? could bring lead home if they don’t follow necessary safety procedures.

The study identified pipe dope containing lead along with lead-based paint hazards as the most likely cause of lead poisoning in at least four children, include two siblings, of three oil field workers working with pipe dope between 2006 and 2009. Elevated lead levels were found on their work clothes as well as inside the washing machines used to wash work clothes along with other family clothes.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

When you work with hazardous chemicals, you can reduce both your risk of exposure and your family's risk of exposure by doing the following:

- Use the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Follow all instructions in the safety data sheet (SDS), such as washing hands before smoking, eating or drinking.
- Keep personal belongings out of contaminated areas of the workplace.
- Wash your hands, shower, wash your hair and change clothes before leaving the workplace.
- Don't take tools and leftover materials home from the workplace. Packaging and scrap may be contaminated.
- Do not pick up a child while you're in work clothes.
- Take precautions not to contaminate child's clothing, toys, household furniture, sleeping quarters, etc.
- Wear disposable clothing and discard it at work after use, or leave contaminated clothing at work.
- If you do have to take work clothes home, carry them in a closed garbage bag in the trunk of your car or the back of your pickup. When you get home, keep these clothes away from other laundry and wash them separately. Keep residue cleaned out of your washing machine, and run the machine through a cycle with a solution of bleach before you use it again for family clothing.

FINAL WORD

Protect yourself and your family by learning the hazards of any chemicals and other dangerous substances in your workplace, and follow all safety precautions to prevent exposure.