LOSS CONTROL NEWSLETTER

May 2019

Carbon Monoxide Awareness

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), inhalation of carbon monoxide (CO) is the number one cause of death of construction workers who breathe in chemicals. CO is a gas produced by the burning of fuel that contains carbon.

CO is an odorless, colorless and tasteless gas, so people may not realize they are exposed to it. Exposure to CO without proper ventilation can cause permanent neurological damage or even be fatal.

Workers who operate gas-powered equipment are at risk for CO poisoning if care is not taken to ensure that the exhaust from the equipment can escape the work space.

Examples of CO-producing equipment include:

- Gas-powered concrete saws
- Portable generators
- Portable industrial heaters
- Power trowels
- Plate compactors
- Water pumps
- Pressure washers

How to keep yourself safe:

Alternatives, like hydraulic saws, do not output dangerous exhaust fumes. If possible, work with equipment that does not require gas to run.

If you do work with gas-powered equipment, make sure there is adequate ventilation – never close all of the doors or windows in a work area.

Note: Just because a door is open does not guarantee safety. There still may not be adequate ventilation to allow CO to escape quickly and avoid buildup.

Make sure your work space has a CO detector or wear a personal alarm that will sound when the level of the gas in the air reaches an unsafe level.

If you feel dizzy, get to fresh air immediately.

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Avoiding Arc Flashes

An arc flash is a large spark that bridges a gap and occurs when electricity travels through the air from one conducting surface to another, or to a ground. This type of electrical discharge has a high current density and is very dangerous.

Each year, over 2,000 people are burned from arc flash incidents. Many of the burn incidents were the result of human error, not faulty equipment or poorly engineered electrical installations.

An arc flash can occur when circuit breakers and disconnects are opened and closed, when exposed electrical equipment is touched with a tool, or when equipment fails. The most effective way to prevent an arc flash is to de-energize or disconnect and lock out the power source before starting any maintenance or repair work.

CREATE AN ELECTRICALLY SAFE WORK AREA:

Unqualified Employee Responsibilities

An employee who works around exposed, energized electrical equipment, but does not have any specialized knowledge or training should never work directly on or close to the live equipment or parts. If you are in this category of worker, you should still know how to remain safe around the equipment in your work area.

Qualified Employee Responsibilities

Employees with specialized knowledge and training should know and follow these procedures:

1. Determine all sources of energy supply to the equipment.
2. Shut off or isolate the load current, then open the disconnecting device(s) for each energy source.
3. Verify all elements of the disconnecting device are open or that circuit breakers are in the fully disconnected position.
4. Apply lockout/tagout devices according to established procedures.
5. Test the voltage using only testing equipment that is in perfect working condition and that is rated for the equipment being tested.
6. Apply appropriate grounding devices as necessary in case stored electrical energy exists.

It is important to never take a shortcut. If you do not shut off the power and lock out the power source, this could lead to an arc flash that can cause bodily harm in just a few milliseconds.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PPE

In addition to using correct procedures to protect yourself from arc flash, you can avoid injury by wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

- Wear all arc-rated PPE, such as non-conductive head protection, safety glasses and an arc-rated face shield.
- Never wear synthetic materials made of nylon, acetate or rayon as outer clothing. They will burn or melt when exposed to an arc flash.
- Do not wear metal objects on clothing. Steer clear of metal buttons, snaps and zippers.
- Make sure your protective clothing is rated flame-resistant.