

Toolbox Talks 2

048: Unsafe Acts with Corrosives

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review your company's documents that comply with the Hazard Communication System Act. Identify a few key points that apply to corrosives, and be prepared to discuss those.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts with corrosive substances.

Discussion notes:

Background

Corrosives can damage your eyes, skin, and lungs. Commonly used solvents are just some of the corrosives you may encounter. A corrosive can be an acid, which will produce pain as it burns you. Or it can be a base, which attacks silently—that is, there will be no pain to tell you something's wrong.

Unsafe acts with corrosives

- Using unlabeled containers. It's easy to use the wrong thing where unlabeled containers are on the job. Also, you find important safety information on product labels.
- Using a corrosive before reading the product label and MSDS. These two sources of safety information tell you how to protect yourself and others. Don't assume you are covered just because you read one and not the other, though. Read both of them. When you have followed the precautions, then use the product.
- Using a corrosive without using the PPE recommended in the MSDS or on the label. This may be a quick task where getting that PPE will take more time than just doing the task. But something splashed on your face because you didn't take a few minutes to get a face shield will leave you scarred for the rest of your life.
- Ignoring the ventilation recommendations (MSDS and label) because you're "using only a little bit." You may intend to use only a little bit but you may spill the container or use more than you intended.
- Leaving lids off containers because you're working with the substance. It's a hassle to put lids back on, just to take them off a few minutes later to get more solvent for your little project. But that hassle is worth it, if it keeps you safe.
- Leaving a spill unreported. Always report a spill immediately. There's a tendency to avoid reporting things. You may feel reporting will get you in trouble, or somehow make you look less capable. When it comes to spills, such attitudes can get you and others hurt. You aren't creating a problem by reporting a spill. Every spill is a problem, just because it happened. Reporting a spill is part of solving the problem.
- Trying to clean up a spill that's too big. If a spill is more than about a gallon, you may have time to throw down some spill containment materials (e.g., "Pigs"®) to help contain the spill. Leave the area and warn others on your way out. Then, report the spill so a properly trained and equipped spill team can clean up the spill.
- Storing a corrosive in an electrical room or near switchgear. One reason not to do this is many corrosives are also flammable. Other reasons also exist. Don't do it.

Review and discussion

1. What's wrong with using an unlabeled container?

2. What should you do before using a corrosive?

3. If you are about to use a solvent for the first time and you see the word “Corrosive” on the product container label, what other document should you read before using this product? *[Note to presenter: Read and follow the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).]*

4. Under what conditions is it OK to use the product without applying the recommended PPE? *[Note to presenter: The point of this question is to make sure people understand there is no such condition. People have been injured while fully aware of the required PPE, because they felt the conditions under which they were using the corrosive created an exception to the PPE requirements. You are protecting yourself from that substance, not from any particular conditions. Use the PPE that the label and MSDS recommend or require.]*

5. The MSDS recommends forced air ventilation. Because you are cleaning a single set of contacts for an instrument connection, not swabbing the floors with this stuff, this seems like much more than is needed. The work is in a small chamber, making forced air ventilation all that much harder to provide. What should you do? *[Note to presenter: Some judgment applies, here. Always provide enough ventilation for the entire container of whatever corrosive you bring into a given area. This way, a spill does not overwhelm your ventilation. You could bring a very small work container of the solvent into the chamber, to reduce total possible fume concentration in the event of a spill. You could also contact the manufacturer via the contact information on the label and in the MSDS and ask what to do in your situation.]*

6. Why should you keep lids on containers as much as possible? What does this mean, in terms of how many open containers you will have at any given time? *[Note to presenter: Keep lids on unless you need access to the contents at that very moment. This means one open container at a time.]*

7. What one thing should you always do when a spill occurs? What are some reasons why? What’s wrong with not doing this? *[Note to presenter: Everyone needs to be keenly aware of the importance of reporting a spill.]*

8. You and a coworker are working a job that requires the use of a corrosive inside a customer’s facility. Returning from break, you discover the gallon can of this corrosive on its side, its contents spilled across the floor. Your coworker insists on not reporting this, on the grounds that doing so could cost your company its contract and him his job. What should you do? *[Note to presenter: You report the spill to the customer, immediately. Then, contact your foreman. You also need to do something about your coworker’s unsafe attitude. What do you think that should be?]*

9. Do you personally need to clean up a spill you create? Why or why not? Can a spill be too big? How do you know? What should you do?

10. Where should you never store a corrosive?

Participant’s Signature and Date
