

Toolbox Talks 2

063: Unsafe Acts: Spills

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review company policies related to the Hazard Communication System and to spill response.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts related to spills.

Discussion notes:

Unsafe acts related to spills

- Not reporting a spill. Report any spill, no matter how minor.
- Delaying a spill report. In some cases, it makes sense not to report the spill immediately. For example, a machine blows a hose and you open the local disconnect before reporting the spill. You may then be tempted to do some quick containment or cleanup work before reporting the spill. Instead, report the spill and then do the containment or cleanup only if you are equipped to do so.
- Cleaning up a spill so it's not as bad when you report it. During this delay, how can you warn others if fumes from the spill overcome you?
- Answering the wrong question. The question is not how to hide that a spill occurred. The question is how to keep everyone in the area safe. The answer: report a spill immediately. Once that's accomplished, a complete and proper cleanup is the next order of business.
- Cleaning up a spill improperly or incompletely. One reason for cleanup is to eliminate a safety hazard. This implies a complete cleanup. Another reason to report a spill is so the right person can ensure the spill was cleaned up properly.
- Disposing of cleanup materials improperly. Throwing toxic materials into the regular trash exposes others to the toxins. EPA considerations also bear on this. One oily rag in a 55 gallon drum of waste safety solvent (trichloroethane) changes the EPA classification of that drum. The disposal cost also rises sharply.
- Operating equipment you're unfamiliar with. You're probably qualified to shut off the power source to the equipment during emergency or spill conditions. But don't start pushing buttons or turning valves. You may do more harm than good.
- Attempting to clean up a spill that's too large. You need help if the spill looks like it's more than a gallon or so.
- Attempting to clean up a spill that may be highly toxic, corrosive, or flammable. Rather than take a chance on dropping dead from the fumes, get out of there. As you leave the area, alert others to also leave. Report the spill immediately, so a response team can contain the spill and clean it up.
- Attempting to clean up a spill of an unidentified substance. If you don't know what the material is, assume the worst.

Review and discussion

1. What one thing must you always do, if a spill occurs? Why?

*[Note to Presenter: Report the spill. It's important to get the right perspective, here. Electricians tend to work **around** substances that spill, rather than with them. Yes, you might use some solvents or lubricants. And if you are following safe handling procedures, you will be using small containers with lids. So any spill will be minor. So usually, a big spill is not your direct responsibility. It's not your job to clean it up, and you typically aren't trained or equipped to handle industrial spills. What is expected of you, then? Only three things: get yourself to safety, alert others on your way out, and report the spill immediately.*

Of course, if you're working directly with equipment or chemicals that involve a spill, you have additional responsibilities. Make sure you know what those are before actually starting the work.]

2. What's wrong with cleaning up a spill before reporting it? What if all you spilled was an ordinary household solvent? *[Note to Presenter: Common sense applies. So you kick over a pint of paint thinner. Obviously, you can throw an absorbent down on it first, and then report it.]*

3. What question should you answer as soon as a spill occurs?

4. Is a partial cleanup better than no cleanup at all? Why or why not?

5. Does it matter how you dispose of spill cleanup materials?

6. If process equipment near your work area suddenly springs a leak, what should your first response be? What's wrong with operating that equipment yourself?

7. When is a spill too large for you to clean up by yourself?

8. If a corrosive or flammable substance spills or leaks, what should you do?

9. If you're unsure about the identity of a spilled or leaked substance, what's wrong with cleaning it up?

10. Suppose you see a pool of liquid under a liquid-filled transformer that hasn't yet been put into service. This is obviously an electrical issue, not an operator issue. What should you do? *[Note to Presenter: The wrong thing to do here is to mop up that liquid. The right thing to do is to report the puddle so the correct follow-up action can be taken. It may be necessary to throw down some absorbent material to dam the spill in so it won't spread and create a slipping hazard. If this transformer is sitting over gravel or soil, EPA cleanup procedures need to be completed and an EPA report filed. For an energized transformer, a leak is a huge danger sign and the condition of the transformer must be determined quickly. If the leak occurred due to excessive heat or pressure inside the transformer casing, you definitely do not want to be standing next to the transformer cleaning up oil.]*

Participant's Signature and Date

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