

Toolbox Talks 2

081: Unsafe Conditions: 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:

This Safety Talk addresses unsafe conditions that involve corrosives.

Discussion notes:

Background

Corrosives can damage your eyes, skin, and lungs. A corrosive can be an acid, which will produce pain as it burns you. Or it can be a base, which does its damage without the pain that tell you something's happening to you. Corrosives range from common solvents you use on the job to uncommon chemicals someone else is using.

Unsafe conditions involving corrosives

- Corrosives stored improperly. If you find a corrosive in an electrical room, obtain the correct PPE and remove the corrosive. If corrosives are stored unsafely—for example, in a cabinet not meant for that purpose—report this to your foreman.
- Corrosives in use but eyewashes or emergency showers not present. Obtain a portable eyewash and shower, if necessary.
- Improper operation of eyewashes or emergency showers. Check portables to ensure they are fully “charged.” Check permanently installed ones by operating them, unless they are alarmed. If they are alarmed, get a verbal confirmation from the operators and do a quick visual inspection.
- Unlabeled containers. If something's in an unlabeled container, it's an unknown. Don't use it. Report it to the person responsible for disposal, or to your foreman.
- Strong odor. You may notice a strong chemical odor upon entering an area. Exit immediately, and report this. Notify your foreman. Don't enter the area under the assumption “the odor will go away unless something's really wrong.” Within minutes, your nose will get used to the odor even though you're still exposed.
- Improper ventilation. If the area isn't ventilated per the recommendations (which you'll find on the MSDS and label), the area is unsafe for using that corrosive. PPE may protect you from the fumes or splash but what about fire and ignitables?
- Appropriate PPE unavailable, or inappropriate PPE provided. Notify your foreman. Don't proceed until this condition is corrected.
- Open containers. These needlessly emit fumes, and they pose a spill hazard. Notify your foreman. Don't proceed until this condition is corrected.
- Spills, puddles, or leaks. Report these immediately. Leave the area until you know it's safe to work there.
- Improper handling. Another crew may be handling corrosives improperly, putting you at risk. Ask them to stop what they're doing, as it's unsafe for everyone. Ventilate as needed, and contact your foreman. If the other crew refuses to stop, leave the area and immediately report the unsafe behavior to an authority who can stop them.

Review and discussion

1. Are you likely to encounter corrosives on the job?
2. What should you do if you find a container of muriatic acid, which is commonly used for cleaning cement, in an electrical room?
3. If you need to install some raceway in a room that contains vessels that hold corrosives, what equipment needs to be in that room? What should you do if it's not there? If it is there, what should you do to ensure it works?
4. What's the problem with an unlabeled container?
5. If you walk into a building and notice a strong chemical smell, what should you do? What you smell it only after you've been there a while?
6. How do you know the ventilation requirements for a particular corrosive, and what should you do if these requirements aren't met?
7. You need to do retrofit work in a room where a given corrosive is present. You've checked the MSDS, and you see certain items of PPE are required. Among those is a charcoal canister respirator. Your foreman told you the site owner provides all chemical-related PPE. You check the PPE storage locker and find a single respirator. But there's no means of cleaning it and no usage log for the canisters. The splash goggles and other items you need are there, except for the splash pants. Is that respirator safe to use? Should you trust yourself to be careful and go without the leg protection? What should you do?
8. Open containers of solvent are in your work area. What should you do?
9. What should you do if you discover a leak in corrosive process piping, as you walk through a room on the way to where you're working?
10. A crew from another trade is pouring some kind of nasty-smelling stuff from a ten-gallon can into a sprayer tank. They're using a paper funnel, and they seem to be getting as much of this *on* the tank as *in* it. What should you do? *[Note to Presenter: Normally, you don't interfere with people who don't work for you. The normal process is to let your foreman handle problems with other crews. But unsafe behavior is not normal. When someone is putting others in danger, you need to act. A threat to your safety usually gives you the authority to do so. Unless your company has a policy to the contrary, your first action should be to ask the other crew to stop the unsafe act. Individual company policies may vary, as to whether you make direct contact with the offending party. This is especially true if that party is in the employ of the site owner or tenant or your company has a history with a known safety scoffer. In the case of direct contact, the correct response from the other person (or from you, if the shoe is on the other foot) is to accept the input and correct what's wrong. If someone responds in any other way, that person is unsafe to work around. Leave the area and hand this problem over to your foreman or the nearest safety authority.]*

Participant's Signature and Date
