

Good Hygiene Toolbox Talk



When most people hear the word “hygiene”, the first thought that comes to mind is personal cleanliness. However, when you work with chemicals or other hazardous substances, industrial “hygiene” is the practice of minimizing your exposure to hazardous substances. By practicing good industrial hygiene, you minimize the potential for unsafe exposures to hazardous substances and for exposing your loved ones to hazardous substances through cross-contamination.

- 1. Smoke, eat, and drink only in designated areas away from areas where hazardous substances are used or stored.** Small amounts of the hazardous substances may be present in the area, therefore smoking, eating, and drinking nearby will cause you to inhale or ingest the hazardous material. Additionally, if you have been working with hazardous substances, you should always wash before smoking, eating, drinking, or applying make-up.
- 2. Protect Your Skin.** Many chemicals are capable of damaging and destroying skin. Before using a chemical, be sure to read the warning label on the container or the material safety data sheet to ensure that you know the risks associated with the chemical and what you can do to protect yourself.
- 3. Do not mix contaminated clothing with your household laundry.** If your work clothing is contaminated with a hazardous substance there is the potential for cross-contamination to occur. To prevent cross contamination, launder contaminated work clothing separate from your household laundry.
- 4. If you splash hazardous substances on your eyes, skin, or clothing, wash promptly, even if you have no apparent symptoms.** The material safety data sheet (MSDS) will provide information about what to do in case of splashes. Of course, the best time to look at the MSDS is before you use the substance, not when an emergency occurs.

5. Remove contact lenses when working in an area where hazardous vapors are present. Contact lenses absorb substances from the air, causing eye irritation and other potentially serious conditions.

These practices help keep hazardous substances away from your skin and eyes and out of your body. None of them are difficult to do. Perhaps the hardest thing about practicing good industrial hygiene on the job is overcoming bad hygiene habits. After all, most people usually don't notice an adverse health symptom immediately after they eat or smoke in an area that is contaminated with hazardous substances. Generally speaking, adverse health symptoms occur after long-term, repeated exposure to hazardous substances. If you are aware of any bad hygiene habits that you practice, the key to changing them is to remember that the only thing that you gain from practicing poor industrial hygiene is poor health.

Below are some personal hygiene "safety tips" you can use both at home and at work. Don't take shortcuts with personal hygiene, just as you shouldn't take shortcuts with safety!

Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water before you eat and after using the restroom.

Never use solvents to clean your hands.

Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough.

If you get cut or lacerated, make sure you wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water.

Dirty or soiled clothing should not be worn again without first being washed.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Ben Franklin