



Risky Business: Construction Workers Should be Aware of Carbon Monoxide Hazards at the Work Site

Need to know information for construction workers to avoid this silent killer

A drywall finisher was using a small gasoline-powered compressor to apply a textured surface to a cathedral ceiling inside of a house. Suddenly, he collapsed and fell from the scaffold on which he was standing. Although he landed on a balcony below, escaping further injury, he was confused and unable to identify an escape route from the building. Fortunately, his coworkers were there to soon rescue him. So why did the worker collapse in the first place?

The above scenario describes the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning, a poisonous gas that can cause illness, permanent neurological damage as well as death. Because it is colorless, odorless and nonirritating, CO can overcome exposed persons without warning, and there is often little time before they experience symptoms that inhibit their ability to seek safety. Within the construction industry, many may not know that small gasoline-powered engines and tools can potentially present this serious health hazard from CO exposure. Additionally, those who operate equipment that has not been previously used or has only been used out of doors can sometimes experience a false sense of safety, which can lead to poisonings on subsequent occasions.

“Many workers using typical gasoline-powered tools such as high-pressure washers, concrete cutting saws, floor buffers, and generators in buildings have been poisoned by carbon monoxide,” said Heidi Dahlberg, Sr. Loss Control Representative, Acadia Insurance. “Even in areas that appear to be well-ventilated, CO can rapidly accumulate and build up to dangerous or fatal concentrations within minutes. Opening doors and windows do not guarantee safety, and it is essential to know the steps to take to avoid this fatal type of poisoning.”

With the fall and winter months fast-approaching, an increased chance of CO poisoning is evident as many workers may choose not to properly ventilate the spaces they are working in due to the cold outside air. CO is a dangerous poison, as workers in areas with closed doors and windows can be incapacitated within minutes. To help prevent CO poisoning, Acadia Insurance offers the following considerations for employers, equipment users, tool rental agencies and tool manufacturers:

- Avoid allowing the operation of gasoline-powered engines or tools inside buildings or in partially enclosed areas unless gasoline engines can be located outside, away from air intakes.
 - The indoor use of gasoline-powered tools where CO from the engine can accumulate can be fatal
- Consider the use of power tools powered by electricity or compressed air if they are available and can be used safely
- Use personal CO monitors where potential sources of CO exist. Monitors should be equipped with alarms to warn workers when CO concentrations are too high.
- Review products and operating instructions for appropriate warnings on the risk of CO poisoning that comes with the operation of gasoline-powered equipment in confined spaces
- Learn to recognize the symptoms and signs of CO overexposure as signs and symptoms can occur rapidly:
 - Headache
 - Nausea
 - Weakness
 - Dizziness
 - Visual Disturbances
 - Changes in personality
 - Loss of consciousness

For more information, please contact your local Acadia branch office or visit Acadia's website at www.acadiainsurance.com.

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