



# Working Safely With Poisons

Simply put, poisons are chemicals that can be fatal even in small doses. But they can be safe to work with if you follow basic safety guidelines and become familiar with the hazards of the poisons you work with.

## Poison Hazards and Protecting Yourself

Examples of poisons used in the construction industry are cleaning compounds and corrosive chemicals and gases. Poisons may be dangerous if swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin. They can cause illness, burns to the skin and eyes, dizziness or suffocation, confusion, coma or death. They may also produce toxic gases when they're burned.

No matter what poison you're working with, you must protect yourself with personal protective equipment such as a respirator, gloves, safety goggles and chemical-resistant boots. Since poisons vary in toxicity, always read the material safety data sheet (MSDS) for any poisons you work with to determine the correct type of personal protection for each poison. Ask your supervisor if you have any questions about the MSDS.

## HANDLING POISONS

-  Be informed about the potential hazards of each poison you work with, what safety equipment to use and what to do in case of an emergency.
-  Always be on the lookout for signs of leakage: defective containers or hoses, odors, drips and chemical residue in loading areas.
-  Handle containers carefully.
-  Store poisons in a well-ventilated area, away from other substances that could be contaminated if a leak occurs.
-  Avoid touching your mouth or eyes, and always wash your hands before eating, drinking, storing food or smoking where poisons are present.
-  Know the phone number for your area's poison control center.
-  Have emergency instructions posted.



# Responding to Emergencies Involving Poisons

Your life and the lives of others may depend on you knowing how to react quickly and correctly during an emergency involving poisons. Use the following guidelines during poison emergencies:

- ☠ Know where to find the phone number of your area's poison control center.
- ☠ Read the material safety data sheet (MSDS) and instructions on how to handle a poison emergency before you need them.
- ☠ If a poison spill occurs, evacuate the area immediately and report the spill to your supervisor, unless you're trained and equipped to handle the type and size of the spill.
- ☠ Reduce contamination by containing the spill, and by keeping it out of drainage systems and water supplies.
- ☠ Avoid using water to wash down a contaminated area.
- ☠ Decontaminate or properly dispose of clothing and equipment that has been contaminated.
- ☠ If a poisoning occurs, immediately call for emergency medical personnel; move the victim into fresh air and contact your local poison control center. Read the poison's label for further help.
- ☠ If dangerous skin or eye exposure has occurred, immediately flush the affected area or eyes with running water for 15 to 20 minutes. Remove contaminated clothing and seek medical help immediately.
- ☠ Send a copy of the poison's MSDS to the hospital with the victim, if possible.

