

SAFETY MEETING TOPIC: Healthy Hygiene in the Workplace

Most of us learned the basics of good personal hygiene when we were children. As we have grown older, some of us may have drifted away from basic hygiene rules and guidance.

In today's chemical laden workplaces, being even more conscientious about hygiene is the smart thing to do. Even though washing our hands is a simple and logical task, it's still commonly overlooked.

What is on your hands gets ingested. How many times have you seen fellow workers smoke a cigarette while their hands were covered with oil or grease? How about the workers who eat their lunch without washing their hands? Not one of us would intentionally eat grease, or dip our cigarette into the grease container. Even so, that is basically what is happening when you eat your sandwich or smoke a cigarette without washing your hands. In addition to tobacco, smokers may be inhaling toxic substances that have been placed on the cigarette from their hands. Remember, when paints, solvents or most any chemical is heated or burned, its chemical makeup is changed.

Cleaning your skin with solvents is never a good practice. Mechanics who use a solvent to clean their hands are setting themselves up for a case of dermatitis or possibly becoming sensitized to the chemical or solvent. Before using the solvent to clean with, think "what is the purpose of a solvent?" A solvent's purpose is to cut grease. When it is used without protection such as gloves or barrier creams, it is degreasing the protective oils from your skin.

Clean clothing is a part of good hygiene. Maintaining good personal hygiene includes the clothes worn to work. A worker wearing oily, greasy clothing, or clothes that have toxic chemicals spilled on them, is likely to experience irritating rashes, boils or other skin problems. Work clothing should be changed daily. A daily shower and clean clothing reduces the chances of skin problems. Remember, dirty clothes and skin carry chemicals to your home and family.

First-aid begins with cleanliness. When we get a sliver, a nick, or a cut we typically go to the first-aid kit. We grab an adhesive bandage, quickly put it on, and go back to work. Several days later we wonder why the small injury is inflamed and infected. Don't ignore small injuries like these. The wounded area should be washed with soap and water before the bandage goes on. Possibly an antiseptic should be placed on the wound as well. This simple trick you first learned from your mom helps to keep the wound from becoming contaminated. To also help prevent a small injury from getting to be a serious health hazard, keep your tetanus booster current. A small needle stick every 10 years is a small price to pay, in the prevention of infection.

Good personal hygiene all boils down to common sense. A daily shower, followed by clean clothing, and frequent washing of hands...particularly before eating or smoking, goes a long way in keeping you healthy and safe.

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