



TOOLBOX TALKS

PREVENTING OCCUPATIONAL ILLNESS

Toolbox Talks are designed to promote safety discussions and best practices on the jobsite. To see more Toolbox Talks, please visit hollandcs.com/toolboxtalks.

Most people confuse the terms safe and healthy. A safe worksite will prevent injury. A healthy worksite will prevent illness. In this case, illness refers to any type of disease or condition caused by the workplace. Examples could be respiratory diseases, skin reactions and even sun burn. So, how does one best keep a worksite healthy?

PREVENTING OCCUPATIONAL ILLNESS

- **KNOWLEDGE:** A large number of occupational-related diseases are a result of an employer or employee not knowing the dangers of a substance with which they are working. Every employer is required to maintain a list of chemicals and the harmful effects they may produce, called the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). If you have not looked through the MSDS for all chemicals used in your workplace, it is never too late to do so. If you have questions about the MSDS talk with your supervisor.
- **PROPER USE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE):** There are three typical routes of exposure for occupational disease: inhalation, ingestion and dermal absorption. PPE is designed to provide a barrier between you and each of these exposure routes.
- **INHALATION:** There are several different types of respiratory masks and cartridges or filters that attach to the mask, depending on the hazard. **ALL MASKS AND CARTRIDGES ARE NOT THE SAME.** Make sure you are using the right one to protect you from the hazard with which you are dealing.
- **INGESTION:** Most employers protect against this exposure route by not allowing food or drinks in the workplace. Food and drinks can absorb chemicals in the air and carry them into your body. Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly before eating.
- **DERMAL ABSORPTION:** The skin is excellent at protecting you from water soluble chemicals. However, solvents, oils, etc. can slip right past your skin barrier. You may not feel it, but you can absorb dangerous levels of chemicals simply by touching them. Gloves, creams and other skin barriers are designed to protect you when your skin cannot.

QUESTIONS TO GENERATE DISCUSSION

- What is an example of an occupational illness?
- With the exception of eating and drinking, how is it possible to ingest a potentially hazardous substance while in the workplace?

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