CARBON MONOXIDE HAZARDS

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED 02/08/2018

The combination of a gasoline-powered equipment used in construction (such as compressors, generators, welding equipment or forklifts) and a confined space has the added danger of carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas which interferes with the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood. CO can overcome a worker without warning and can lead to serious tissue damage, or even death.

Common signs of overexposure to CO include headache, nausea, weakness, dizziness, blurred vision, confusion, shortness of breath and loss of consciousness. There is often little time before symptoms can inhibit the ability to seek safety.

- Prior use of equipment without incident has sometimes given users a false sense of safety. Recommendations for preventing CO poisoning include:
- Educate workers about the sources and conditions that could result in CO poisoning, as well as the symptoms and control of CO exposure.
- Conduct a workplace survey to identify all potential sources of CO exposure.
- Use personal CO monitors where potential sources of CO exist. These monitors should be equipped with audible alarms to warn workers when CO concentrations are too high.
- Consider the use of tools powered by electricity or compressed air if they are available and can be used safely.
- When using gasoline-powered engines or tools outside of a building, never place them near air intakes so that engine exhaust is not drawn indoors.
- Always place the pump and power unit of high-pressure washers outdoors. Run only the high-pressure wash line inside.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is often misdiagnosed as the flu. If you suspect that a worker has symptoms associated with carbon monoxide poisoning, take the following steps:

- Open the doors and windows.
- Turn off combustion appliances and have everyone leave the area immediately.
- Since CO can cause long-term, and even permanent injury and illness, seek medical attention.

A CO detector can be a viable solution to preventing CO-related mishaps. It is a small, easy-to-install gadget that is available at most hardware stores. CO detectors usually cost less than $100, and some even combine the safety features of a smoke alarm with carbon monoxide detection.

Like other jobsite hazards, CO mishaps are preventable. We must all recognize where the hazards exist and put appropriate controls in place to avoid unintentional injuries.

Download the recording form here.