

TOOLBOX TALK #14

UNDERSTANDING THE HAZARDS OF ASPHALT

Millions of tons of asphalt are produced and used in the paving and roofing industries every year and more than 500,000 workers are exposed to fumes from asphalt.

Asphalt is derived from crude oil. Exposure to asphalt fumes can cause headaches, skin rashes, sensitization, fatigue, reduced appetite, throat and eye irritation, coughing and skin cancer.

Two main hazards associated with working with asphalt are fires and explosions and inhalation of the substance's fumes.

Fire/Explosion prevention

Asphalt is often stored and handled at high temperatures, so it's important to take fire prevention seriously. One of the greatest hazards in handling hot asphalt is exposure to a source of ignition. Sparks, electricity, open flames, incandescent material (lighted cigarette), or other possible ignition sources should be prohibited or otherwise strictly controlled in the vicinity of asphalt operations.

Fume Safety

Workers handling asphalt should be educated on its hazards and safe work procedures, and Safety Data Sheets should be available.

Personal Protective Equipment

PPE is necessary to protect workers from asphalt burns and irritation, because many of the solvents used to cut asphalt can be absorbed through unprotected skin into the bloodstream, where they can travel throughout the body and cause damage to many different organs.

When working with heated asphalt, recommended PPE includes chemical goggles, loose clothing with closed collars and buttoned cuffs, thermally insulated gloves with gauntlets that extend up the arm, and boots with tops at least 6 inches high. Also, workers should wear safety shoes and barrier creams.