

November 2003

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Risks Increase in Winter

A worker was operating a propane powered floor burnisher (polisher) in a retail environment when he lost consciousness; employees in another store in the complex also fell ill. The culprit was carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odourless and tasteless gas which is created when ever fossil fuels such as propane, natural gas, or gasoline are burned. It quickly builds up in poorly ventilated areas. Note that "poorly ventilated" does not just mean small enclosed spaces like closets. In the incident mentioned here, the poisonings occurred in a shopping mall.

CO poisonings tend to occur more in the winter - vehicles and other equipment are left running indoors in shops and garages; there may be problems such as cracks, blockages, etc with a natural gas heating system which only become apparent once the system is turned on; supplemental fuel fired heaters are brought indoors to help heat a large space; or exhaust gases are being back-drafted into buildings (if a building is negatively pressured, air will come back down the exhaust flue).

Carbon Monoxide is called a "chemical asphyxiant" meaning that although there is enough oxygen in the room, the CO interferes with the body's absorption of that oxygen. Symptoms of overexposure include headache, faintness, dizziness, nausea and confusion. Unfortunately, at low concentrations the symptoms are similar to and could be confused with the flu. If these symptoms occur where fuel fired equipment is being used, consider the possibility that CO is the cause. CO can also affect the heart, and individuals with pre-existing heart conditions may be at higher risk. At higher concentrations, it can cause unconsciousness and death.

To prevent CO poisoning this winter ensure that heating and ventilation systems are maintained properly, with adequate supply air provided; do not warm up vehicles or other equipment indoors, unless there is local exhaust ventilation available for the equipment; and only use smaller fuel fired equipment if there is sufficient ventilation to keep airborne CO levels below legal limits. If fuel fired equipment is used indoors, consider installing CO monitors.

Fire Hydrant Tampering Leads to Incident

A contractor working for a municipality recently experienced a serious incident when an AVK fire hydrant failed, striking the employee in the face. The nozzle of the hydrant came off the hydrant body while the hydrant was being operated. The investigation determined that the nozzle in question had been tampered with. Always verify that the hydrant nozzle is properly installed and not tampered with: if the arrow indicator tab is missing or not aligned with the set screw, do not use the hydrant. AMHSA was provided photographs showing examples of acceptable and unacceptable conditions; if you would like to see them, give us a call. In addition to ensuring that the hydrant is acceptable to use, always ensure that there are no people or objects in the path of the hydrant when it is pressurized, and the nozzle is in use.

If you would like to have a look at the photographs, find out more about this incident, or be put in contact with the municipality involved, contact AMHSA.

AHRE considering issuing tickets on site for safety violations

In 2002 the minister for Alberta Human Resources and Employment announced that the government wanted to see a 40% reduction in the number of workplace injuries by 2004. A working group was established to draft a strategy and stakeholders were consulted. One of the recommendations from this process was that the government assess the potential effectiveness of a system of administrative fines (i.e. officers issue tickets at the worksite).

The government studied the issue and has decided to attempt a pilot of a system of ticketing in the construction industry. Tickets would be issued to workers for non compliance with specific provisions of the new OH&S Code.

There is a discussion paper and questionnaire on their website. Go to www.whs.gov.ab.ca for the details and to give your opinion on the proposal.

Head's Up: North American Occupational & Health Week coming May 2 - 8, 2004

North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH) Week is a North American wide initiative that involves the participation of governments, employers and workers in Canada, United States and Mexico. Its goals are: increase understanding of the benefits of investing in occupational health and safety; raise awareness of the roles and contributions of safety and health professionals; and reduce the incidence of workplace injuries and illness.

NAOSH week 2004 is scheduled for the week of May 2nd - 8th and the theme this year will be "building a safe beginning".

NAOSH week will provide opportunities for municipalities to get the health and safety message out to their employees and the community at large. By supporting and promoting NAOSH week municipalities can demonstrate leadership in injury prevention. Start planning now for what you can do to participate in NAOSH week in 2004. Some possibilities are:

- declaration of NAOSH week by the mayor or reeve
- health and safety displays at shopping malls, municipal offices, etc
- employee recognition events (awards, luncheons, etc)
- posters, newspaper articles, colouring competitions, etc
- demonstration of procedures (e.g. emergency rescue, or new safer technologies for certain jobs)

There are almost a dozen local NAOSH week committees throughout the province, all planning activities for their area. If you would like to find out more about what is planned for your area, or better yet, if you would like to participate in the planning for your area, give us a call - we can give you contact information for each of the local committees. There is also a NAOSH week website; however in looking at it today, it was not yet updated with much 2004 information. It should be updated soon. You can go to www.naosh.ca and keep an eye on it as it develops over the next few months.

Conferences

RUSA/ACSC/AMHSA Conference: this conference - with both utility issues and health & safety workshop topics - will be held in Red Deer on December 3rd and 4th. We sent out information and registration packages in late September; if you didn't get a package, and/or would like more information, give us a call.

Health and Safety Conference: included with this edition of *Municipal Health and Safety News* is a brochure for this multi-industry health and safety conference. It will be held in Calgary on November 25th and 26th.

Legislation Update

Over that last years and months we have been telling you about the OH&S legislation review. The Act was amended last December and the existing 11 regulations are being reviewed, revised, added to, and blended into one large document called the Occupational Health and Safety Code. Last month we told you that the new OH&S Code would be passed by now. We were wrong. It has been delayed a bit; the most recent information that we have is that it will be passed in mid November.

AMHSA is developing a workshop to help you understand the new requirements (focusing on issues we believe are most relevant to municipal operations). We expect that the workshop will be approximately half a day, and the fee will be the standard \$30 per person. We will offer it like any of our courses - in several locations around the province as well as on site, at your request. As for when the workshop will be available, we are hoping for Christmas time (the perfect Christmas gift?). However we are waiting until the Code is passed before finalizing the workshop contents. We will continue to keep you posted...

The Winter Weather is Here

The first winter storm hit a large part of the province this week, so this is a good time to think about how winter weather affects the health and safety of municipal staff. There are issues about working in the cold, working in the dark, slippery conditions (roads, parking lots, walkways, lobbies, equipment steps...) In addition, stress levels sometimes increase. Many people (staff and rate payers alike) suffer some level of depression as a result of shortened day light hours, so relations among staff, and between the rate payers and staff might sometimes be strained.

What can be done to get through this winter injury/incident free?

- Everyone needs to slow down, take their time, and be willing to be late. This is sometimes easier said than done. As individuals, we all feel obligated to get the job done, done well, and done quickly. And as individuals we each need to take the responsibility to slow down, but the employer can help by stressing to employees that not only is it **ok** for them to go slower and take their time, it is **expected** - that is that safety does not take a back seat to production. This needs to be stated regularly, and managements' behavior must reflect this.
- Everyone also needs to consider if all work related travel is necessary. Some travel is required

(emergency response, snow clearing, emergency repairs). But lots of our "important" work can wait, or be done over the phone, via e-mail, etc. The fewer vehicles there are on the road during poor road conditions, the better it is for everyone.

- Keep walkways clear of snow and ice; use sand/ice melt as needed. Keep lobbies dry! Many offices have tile or other flooring that gets extremely slippery when it's wet. Use mats liberally, or better yet, apply a non-slip coating in entrance ways. Consider applying non-slip coatings to the steps of large equipment also. Concrete floors in shops can also be very slippery when wet, so try to keep them dry, and make sure operators leave their units carefully, using handles appropriately, and don't jump. Shop floors can also be coated with non-slip coatings.
- Make sure anyone who has to work out doors is properly protected against the cold. Several lighter layers are usually better than one heavy layer. It is also important to keep extremities warm. Hats and mitts or gloves are also necessary. Consider if the extra clothing will have an impact on any personal protective equipment needed. Allow opportunities for employees to warm up on regular intervals. If manual work is being done, remember that we perspire in the cold, not just in the heat, so ensure employees stay hydrated. AHRE has a publication on working in the cold: go to www.whs.gov.ab.ca and go to "publications, videos and statistics". The publication number is MG021.
- In addition to being protected from the cold, employees need to be protected from the hazards of traffic. Make sure anyone working near traffic is visible. Often at this time of year work is done in low light/darkness, so employees should be wearing high visibility retro-reflective clothing. The Canadian Standards Association has recently released a new standard for high visibility clothing: Z96-02.
- Workplace stress is a concern all year, but stress and depression appear more prevalent in the winter. All employees need to feel supported and recognized, and feel that their efforts are appreciated. They also need to have the tools and skills to do their jobs well. This applies all year long. In the winter many of us travel to and from work in darkness, and spend all day indoors. Employees should be encouraged to get outside as much as possible at lunch and breaks. Sun light is helpful (even on cloudy days, there is enough sunlight to lift our spirits if we go outside). People might not be real keen to go outside on a cold winter day, so think about organizing walking groups, or creating some friendly competition. Keep the walks short - any of us can tough it out for 15 to 20 minutes. The combination of exercise and daylight will go a long way to helping everyone feel better.

News from WCB - Claims for Volunteer Firefighters

An article appeared in the August 2003 edition of *Alberta Fire News* addressing acceptance of cancer claims by the WCB for volunteers. The key points are summarized here; for the complete article, go to www.gov.ab.ca/mo/fco and look for *Alberta Fire News*.

As you may be aware, legislation was passed last April that ensures that Alberta's professional firefighters get automatic compensation if they develop certain cancers that are commonly associated with the profession of firefighting. How does this apply to volunteers? The legislation only allows the automatic compensation if the member has worked and been exposed to the hazards of a fire scene for a minimum period of time (each different cancer has a different exposure time). This is to address the issue of frequency/degree of exposure and development of the cancers.

Although volunteers are not included in the legislation, this same logic of looking at the degree of exposure would be applied to any volunteers who have developed any of the specified cancers. The WCB would ask questions about the volunteer's work history - the types of fires, frequency of firefighting etc. (exact details are not required - just general information).

In the December edition of ***Alberta Fire News***, will be an article on WCB wage loss benefits for volunteers, and what they can expect when they file a claim.