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Good Hygiene on the Job

There's more to good hygiene than being clean. When you're working with chemicals or other hazardous substances, the word "hygiene" takes on a meaning beyond smelling good and looking nice. The goal of good hygiene on the job is to prevent accidental exposures caused by inhaling or ingesting hazardous substances. By consistently practicing good hygiene when working with hazardous substances, exposures caused by accidental cross-contamination can be prevented. Following are seven major good hygiene practices.

Smoke, eat, and drink only in designated areas away from areas where hazardous materials are used or stored. Small amounts of the substances may be present in the area, and smoking, eating, and drinking nearby will cause you to inhale or ingest the hazardous material. You should always wash before smoking, eating, or drinking if you have been working with hazardous materials.

Keep work clothes clean and in good condition. Holes or tears will allow hazardous materials to get on your clothes or skin, increasing the likelihood that you will be exposed to the substance.

Do not mix contaminated clothing with your home laundry. Not only will cross-contamination occur, but it is possible to cause a fire if these clothes are laundered. Find out what to do with your contaminated clothing before you leave work.

If you splash hazardous materials on your eyes, skin, or clothing, wash promptly in the proper manner, even if you have no apparent symptoms. The MSDS will provide information about what to do in case of splashes. Of course, the best time to look at the MSDS is before you use the substance, not when an emergency happens. In the event of an injury, immediately contact your supervisor, project manager, or Office HSE Representative.

Always wash before you apply makeup, lotion, or lip balm. Applying these to contaminated skin is likely to cause an accidental exposure.

Remove contact lenses when working in an area where vapors are present. Contact lenses absorb substances from the air, causing eye irritation and other potentially serious conditions.

Keep hazardous material storage areas clean. In case of a spill, the area should be cleaned according to proper spill control and clean-up procedures. Materials used to clean up the spill must also be disposed of properly.

These practices help keep hazardous materials away from and out of your body. None of them are difficult to do. Perhaps the hardest thing about practicing good hygiene on the job is to overcome bad hygiene habits. After all, no one usually notices a health effect right away if they eat or smoke in a hazardous materials area. Gradually, bad habits replace good ones. Over time, because of chronic exposure to hazardous materials caused by these bad habits, a health effect may appear. If you are

aware of any personal bad hygiene habits, the key to changing them is to remember that, in the long run, your good health is at risk because of the bad habit.

