Bathtub Refinisher Dies from Exposure to Methylene Chloride

Background

Since 2000, at least 13 bathtub refinishers have died nationwide due to overexposure to methylene chloride-based strippers. One of these 13 fatalities occurred in Massachusetts. All of these deaths occurred during work in residential bathrooms with inadequate ventilation. In addition, personal respiratory protection was insufficient: respirators were either not used or were the wrong type to protect against methylene chloride (MC) vapors.

What happened in Massachusetts?

In 2004, a 43-year-old contractor was hired to refinish a bathtub. While stripping the bathtub with an MC-based stripper, he was found unconscious in the bathroom slumped over the bathtub. The bathroom did not have windows or exhaust ventilation. The victim was wearing a disposable respirator while stripping the bathtub.

What can be done?

To prevent similar incidents and risk of severe injury and death:

Do not use MC-based strippers:

- MC-based strippers most likely cannot be used safely in small and medium enclosed bathrooms.
- Use alternative stripping methods, such as sanding and using non-MC-based strippers.

WARNING: Alternate methods may have their own hazards of which to be aware.

Did you know? Methylene chloride is:

- colorless, very volatile and toxic.
- absorbed primarily through inhalation, but also the skin.
- regulated as a cancer-causing chemical.
- a central nervous system depressant causing narcosis, heart failure and sudden death.
- metabolized into carbon monoxide (CO) that can lead to CO poisoning and death.
- heavier than air. Without ventilation, highest concentrations will be inside the tub.

If MC-based strippers must be used:

- Always adhere the manufacturer's instructions.
- Follow the steps on the back of this alert.

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