

New York State Public Entities Safety Group 497

Safety Agenda

___ Chief, Fire Department
___ Site Administrators
___ Commissioners
___ Human Resources
___ Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
___ Elected Officials

Volume 14, Issue 4

August 2007

Published by NYS Public Entities Safety Group 497 – Dedicated to improving workplace safety

Lightning Risk Reduction

Lightning is one of nature's deadliest hazards. Here in the northeast, thunderstorms are common in the summer months and we are prone to downplay the risk of being struck by lightning. About 100 people are killed and 500 are injured in the U.S. each year.

People injured by lightning strikes do not recover easily. They sustain long term memory loss, attention deficits, sleep disorders, numbness, dizziness, stiffness in joints, irritability, fatigue, etc.

The National Weather Service (NWS) has succinct advice: **"When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors!"** The safest "indoor" location is a large enclosed building - not a picnic shelter or a shed, or a baseball dugout. "Safe" buildings have electrical wiring and plumbing which will route the electrical charge into the ground. (For that reason, stay away from showers, sinks, hot tubs, etc., and electronic equipment such as TVs, radios and computers.) The second safest location is an enclosed metal vehicle, car, truck, or van, but not a convertible, bike or other topless or soft top vehicle.

When a safe shelter is nearby, you should seek shelter when you first hear thunder, see dark threatening clouds developing nearby, or lightning. Stay inside until 30 minutes after you last hear thunder.

There is no safe place to be outside in a thunderstorm. Do not seek shelter under tall isolated trees or under partially enclosed buildings. Stay away from tall, isolated objects and metal objects such as fences, poles and backpacks. The current from a lightning flash travels easily for long distances through metal.

Avoid using electronic devices when you are outside and an electrical storm is threatening. There are a number of reports of injuries to users of personal electronic devices such as beepers, Walkman players, iPods, and laptop computers. Metal in electronic devices conducts the electricity, causing serious burns. The same is true of metal jewelry or coins in a pocket.

Work crews and playground supervisors should be aware of the dangers of lightning strikes, and should definitely have a plan for lightning risk reduction. Some considerations:

1. Know your local weather patterns
2. Schedule outdoor activities to avoid lightning.
3. Be in touch with the National Weather Service warning system through a portable radio on your person, or in touch with an office person with responsibility for monitoring the weather radio.
4. Know when you are in danger of lightning and where to go for safety. Take stock of your surroundings before activity starts, and decide where you will seek shelter. Remember that it will take longer to get a group to safety than an individual.
5. Avoid the locations that have the greatest risk--elevated places, open areas, tall isolated trees and objects, bodies of water.
6. Anticipate the possible need for first aid - CPR, 911, an AED.
7. Brief supervisors on the importance of lightning risk reduction and make spot checks to verify that on-site supervisors have thought through and communicated their plans.

See the following websites for more information: www.nssl.noaa.gov and click on education, www.struckbylightning.org and www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov.

Visit our Website at www.nysgroup497.com

Group Manager: Professional Underwriters – 1-800-833-8822, ext. 119

Are You Prepared for Emergencies?

Would you know what to do if a co-worker was seriously injured, or if a fire started up, or if a structure collapsed? Emergencies happen – and not just involving the other guy. When disaster strikes where no one is prepared to react, lives are lost.

How does one learn how to respond to an emergency? Preferably not through experience! A good first step is to earn certification in Basic First Aid and CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation.) These courses teach important life saving skills, and they also teach how to respond to an emergency. American Red Cross courses also teach people about the kinds of situations and conditions that can precipitate an emergency. Being aware of what can happen and how to react will help you to react when the inevitable happens.

Review your organization's emergency action plan periodically. Be aware of what steps to follow when calling for emergency help.

Keep your safety awareness at a high level through safety meetings, safety training and your own personal interests. Be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. How and whom do you notify in an emergency?
2. Am I prepared to act responsibly?
3. Should I stay with the injured person or run for help?
4. If you are not First Aid certified, do you know which of your co-workers is?
5. Does the scene of the emergency need to be secured?
6. Do I know the chain of command? Who is in charge during an emergency?

Know how to protect yourself and your co-workers.

Alert: Health Hazards from Grout Sealer

Over 130 individuals have brought product liability suits against Home Depot and five companies involved in the manufacture and distribution of Tile Perfect Stand 'N Seal Grout Sealer, claiming that their health has been permanently damaged from using the product.

Stand N'Seal is an aerosol chemical spray containing Flexipel. Claimants allege that users of the spray have been hospitalized, lost the use of lungs and have died from exposures to its toxicity which "should never have been used in an aerosol". The defendant companies have been vigorously denying the claims and attempting to shift the blame to each other.

The product has been pulled from the shelves and is not available for sale at this time. Nevertheless, it would be wise to check your inventory of left over tile setting supplies.

New USFA Training System Unveiled

The U.S. Fire Administration has announced the launch of a new Web-based online training system for firefighters - NFAOnline. NFAOnline is USFA's effort to make available training and materials for firefighters, especially those unable to attend resident courses.

There are eight courses on line including supervision, incident management, emergency response to terrorist incidents, and emergency medical services. To enroll in NFAOnline, see www.nfaonline.dhs.gov and select New Students.

Did You Know...

That one in twelve employees uses illegal drugs?

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, an agency within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services)