Can You Do the Chemical Splash Dash?

What's at Stake?

If a chemical splashed onto your skin or into your eye, could you get to a safety shower or eyewash station quickly?

The time to consider that question is now, not when you are faced with an emergency. You need to know where this equipment is located, the shortest route to reach it and how to use it effectively.

What's the Danger?

When a corrosive chemical makes contact with your skin or your eyes, it begins to damage the tissue. The effect on your skin can be painful, disfiguring and possibly fatal. The effect in your eyes can be pain, temporary or partial loss of vision, or permanent blindness.

Rinsing away the chemical can halt the progressive damage. This is where the safety shower and eyewash station come into the picture. If you get there fast enough and rinse well enough for a long enough time, you can greatly reduce the damage to your skin and eyes.

Example

A worker was attempting to remove an end plug from a pipe containing a 100 percent concentration of anhydrous hydrofluoric acid under pressure. He applied sufficient pressure with a wrench to break the pipe, which had been corroded by the acid.

As the acid spewed out of the pipe, it knocked off the victim's protective head and face shield and he received acid burns to his face.

For some reason, the victim didn't get to the safety shower right away, nor did he stay in it long enough. His face was severely damaged by the acid, he'd inhaled acid vapor and the toxic fluoride from the acid was absorbed into his body. At the hospital, he went into cardiac arrest and died.

How to Protect Yourself

So back to the question—could you reach the safety shower or eyewash station quickly from the area where you are handling chemicals? Is the path clear? Could you find your way if you were temporarily blinded?

And what would be waiting for you when you get there? Do you know how to turn it on—

with a push button, overhead pull bar or other kind of control?

If a chemical is spilled or splashed onto your skin or into your eyes, you must immediately start rinsing the affected area keeping at it for at least 20 minutes. Meanwhile, someone must call for emergency medical help. You might need assistance in keeping your eyes open, removing contaminated clothing or standing under the stream of the shower. So it is important that you also know how to help someone else in such as emergency.

Consider these additional tips for working safely with chemicals:

- Know the hazards. Get the necessary training on the dangers of chemicals and how to protect yourself.
- Read the safety data sheets (SDSs) for any chemical you handle in the workplace. Also read labels, which have similar information, including what to do in an emergency.
- Use the recommended personal protective equipment to protect yourself from chemical exposure, such as aprons, boots, gloves, goggles and face shields.
- Follow all the recommended procedures for moving, storing and opening chemicals containers. Measure and mix only as directed and keep containers closed and labeled.

Final Word

Do your part to keep safety showers and eyewash stations working so they will be available in emergencies. Report any defects, damaged signage and blocked access so the problems can be corrected promptly.