



KENTUCKY
AGC Self Insurers' Fund

Asphalt Dangers

Used in paving, roofing, waterproofing and some glue products, asphalt is a sticky substance derived from crude oil. The material is mixed with solvents to change it into liquid form and make it easier to work with. Unfortunately, these substances can be hazardous, flammable and increase the risk of occupational injuries. In fact, road workers, roofers, hot-mix facility employees and general construction employees are at risk of asphalt-related health problems.

Dangers to Your Health

When workers heat asphalt, the fumes produced can cause coughing, a scratchy throat, headaches, skin rashes, fatigue, eye irritation and lung problems. In the long-term, asphalt exposure can cause lung and stomach cancer, pigment changes in the skin, bronchitis and emphysema. In addition, asphalt additives may cause damage to the liver, kidneys and nervous system. When hot asphalt releases hydrogen sulfide gas into the air, suffocation and even death may occur.

Safety Measures

To prevent unnecessary exposure and illness, consider these safety recommendations when working with asphalt:

- Keep sparks, flames and cigarettes away from asphalt, as it is extremely flammable.
- Transfer asphalt automatically by way of a pump to minimize exposure, and enclose the mixing and stirring operations, when possible.
- Always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE): thermally insulated gloves, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, vented goggles (when working with liquids) and face shields (when working with corrosive liquids that are toxic). If you wear a face shield, also put on a pair of goggles underneath for added protection.
- Never eat, drink, smoke or apply cosmetics near asphalt handling areas.
- After working with asphalt, always thoroughly wash your hands before eating, drinking, smoking or using the restroom.
- If you start to feel sick, let your supervisor know immediately and remove yourself from the working area.
- Stay upwind of application areas and enclose kettles and mixing operations to prevent unnecessary exposure.
- To prevent burns and overexposure to asphalt fumes, do not stick your head over an open tank.
- Do not place any water near asphalt, as it can cause a bubbling explosion.

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