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SafetyWorks! Newsletter for a Safer Workplace, Fall 2005

Maine Department of Labor

Maine Bureau of Labor Standards

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Permit Required Confined Spaces
(29CFR1910.146)

Steven Greeley, Occupational Safety & Health Supervisor

A confined space means a space that is large enough and configured so that an employee can bodily enter and perform assigned work; has limited or restricted means of entry or exit; and is not designed for continuous occupancy.

Once employers determine they have confined spaces, they need to assess those spaces and determine if any is permit required. A permit-required confined space has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Contains or has the potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere;
- Contains a material that has the potential for engulfing an entrant;
- Has an internal configuration such that an entrant could be trapped or asphyxiated by inwardly converging walls or by a floor which slopes downward and tapers to a smaller cross-section; or
- Contains any other recognized serious safety or health hazard.

If an employer identifies permit-required confined spaces, and an employee is going to enter these spaces, a written permit space program is required. However, if the only hazard in these spaces is an actual or potential hazardous atmosphere, and the employer can demonstrate that this hazard can be controlled through continuous forced air ventilation, develops monitoring and inspection data to support this, then the space can be entered as a nonpermit space under the “alternate procedure.”

Remember: Under the alternate procedure, before an employee can enter the space, the internal atmosphere shall be tested with a calibrated direct reading instrument, there may be no hazardous atmosphere within the space whenever an employee is inside the space, and continuous forced air ventilation shall be used.

For more information on confined spaces, visit our web site www.safetyworksmaine.com or the Occupational Safety & Health Administration at www.osha.gov.
Maine occupational safety and health information is not only of use for the study and prevention of work-related injury and illness in Maine, but at the national level as well. Last year, the Technical Services Division was able to provide detailed workers’ compensation case-by-case data, including costs, to University of California at Davis public health researchers J. Paul Leigh and John A. Robbins. Their work was published as “Occupational Disease and Workers’ Compensation: Coverage, Costs and Consequences” in The Milbank Quarterly, Vol. 82, No. 4.

For the year 1999, Leigh and Robbins compared national epidemiological estimates of deaths and costs for all occupational disease with the workers’ compensation cases, where the deaths and costs were estimated from the data provided by 16 states. They found that the epidemiological studies emphasized long-term fatal diseases, particularly cancer, chronic respiratory disease and circulatory disease, while workers’ compensation data emphasized nonfatal diseases and conditions like tendonitis and hernia. This comparison suggests that workers’ compensation nationally missed between 46,000 and 93,000 deaths and between $8 billion and $23 billion in medical costs alone. These costs were paid by the individual workers, their families, private medical insurance, and the taxpayers (through Medicare and Medicaid).

The authors did not offer recommendations for public policy change to remedy this lack of coverage. The difficulty of establishing the job-relatedness of long-term or chronic conditions is well known. This study documents and estimates the effect of that problem. To address this issue in Maine, the Department is working with the Department of Health and Human Services in developing occupational health indicators and improving the occupational disease reporting system statewide.

Maine Workers’ Compensation Data
Contributes to National Study
Theodore E. Bradstreet, Planning & Research Associate II

Visit our web site at www.safetyworksmaine.com
WANTED
ONE COUNTY EMPLOYEE

The Board of Occupational Safety & Health currently has a vacancy for the County Employee representative position.

This position would represent all County Employees regarding workplace safety & health issues raised before the Board of Occupational Safety & Health.

Interested parties should send their letter of intent and résumé to:
Dawn McKenney, Clerk of the Board of Occupational Safety & Health, 45 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333-0045.

For more information, call (207) 624-6498.

Traffic Control At Emergency Scenes

Emergency services personnel, including fire, police, and EMS, are required to train their employees on traffic control hazards at emergency scenes.

If you were not able to attend the September or December Train-the-Trainer Traffic Control at Emergency Scenes classes, contact SafetyWorks! at (207) 624-6400 or toll-free at 1-877-SAFE-345 (7233) to request a copy of the CD training program. A video of the program is currently being developed, and will be placed in our free video lending library. Limited copies will also be sent to County Associations.

Labor Standards Update

Recently the Bureau of Labor Standards met with local officials to review enforcement checklists and answer any questions. Response was great and we appreciate all the feedback and recommendations.

We are always updating and adding compliance directives to our web site. Be sure to go to our web site periodically to find any changes or additions.

The most recent update was made on 10/3/05. Training items were added and clarification was needed on the Fire Department, Police Department, and Public Works checklists. We have also added an enforcement checklist for Parks & Recreation Departments.

To find updated compliance directives or checklists go to www.maine.gov/labor/bls/newpsw.htm

COLD WEATHER IS COMING...
David E. Wacker, Director

Every year we hear about near misses and accidents due to cold weather activities. These happen off the job, as well as on the job, and most can be eliminated by proper training and good safety and health practices. The accidents reported range from the loss of fingers in a snow blower, to frostbite, to deaths caused by carbon monoxide poisoning.

Any snow removing machine, whether it's a snow blower or a plow must be locked out or shut off prior to working on the machine. If the snow blower needs gas or the chute is plugged, shut it off prior to anything being done. The same with a plow, as long as there is hydraulic fluid under pressure, there is a risk of injury. The blade should be lowered and the engine shut off prior to working on the plow.

Never operate a generator in a place of work or residence. Carbon dioxide (CO) is a silent, colorless, odorless killer. CO can be present with a poorly operating furnaces or wood stoves. Signs you may have a possible carbon monoxide problem include headaches or experiencing sudden flu like symptoms. Contact your family doctor if this occurs. To protect yourself and your family, a home CO detector will warn you if CO is present, which could save your life. Remember to change the batteries in the CO detector, as well as the smoke detectors. If the alarm goes off, get outside immediately and call 911 for assistance.
How Good Are Your Tires for Winter Driving?

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's 2005 ratings cover more than 2,400 lines of the most popular passenger vehicle tires sold in the U.S. The agency rates tires based on traction, treadwear and their ability to resist heat. This year, nearly 90 tire lines received the highest possible rating for traction. Also, five tire brands (Big-O, Goodyear, Michelin, Bridgestone and Cordovan) produce tire lines that received exceptional ratings for tread durability.

"Higher quality tires, along with good maintenance, provide consumers a greater margin of safety. The tire grading system is a big help in the often-confusing process of selecting tires," said NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D.

Because heat can increase the risk of blowout, temperature ratings are important. Tires with the highest heat resistance are graded “A” followed by “B,” or “C” (lowest). For some consumers, stopping distances on a wet road can be important. Traction ratings are expressed in letter grades from “AA” – the highest - to “C” – the lowest. Tires with a higher treadwear rating should last longer. In grading for treadwear, tires are ranked numerically according to durability. The higher the number, the more durable the tire.

Tire ratings can be found on NHTSA's web site at www.safercar.gov/tires/pages/tireratings.cfm.

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

From the Director

October was Domestic Violence month. The effects of domestic violence spread throughout society, including the workplace. The Maine Department of Labor, in conjunction with Family Crisis Services recently released the results of a study on the occupational impact of domestic violence on the victims. One of the more telling numbers is that 98% of the victims reported that the abuse caused them to have difficulty concentrating on work tasks. The abuse often occurs at the workplace: 87% report receiving phone calls at work and 78% said their abuser showed up at the victim's place of work. Yet, it appears that only 5% of the victim's employers had domestic violence policies. Full results are available on our website: www.maine.gov/labor/bls/publications/survivorstudy.pdf

It is important that employers be prepared to respond to domestic violence at their workplace. One of the best ways is to have a policy in place to protect and support the victim and ensure the safety of the victim's co-workers. SafetyWorks! has resources available, including training. Additional resources are available through the Attorney General's Office, the Department of Public Safety, and the local domestic violence support organizations. The Maine Department of Labor has created a poster on domestic violence to help raise awareness of employees' rights and responsibilities. It can be downloaded at www.maine.gov/labor/bls/posters/domesticviolence.pdf.

William Peabody, Director
Bureau of Labor Standards

Visit our web site at www.safetyworksmaine.com