



## Toolbox Talk: Flammable Liquids

A worker was using a flammable solvent for cleaning and spilled some of it on his clothing. After he finished the job, he paused to smoke. The instant he struck the match to light his cigarette, he became engulfed in flames. There are many other cases where flammable liquids have caused serious fires that have resulted in injury, loss of life, and property damage.

Many kinds of flammable liquids are used every day on many jobs: gasoline, cleaning fluids, paints and thinners, to name a few. However, the danger of these materials can be controlled.

### Interesting Facts

Flammable liquids do not burn, as many people believe. As the liquid evaporates, it gives off vapors that combine with the air to form dangerous gaseous mixtures that can be ignited by the smallest spark.

Gasoline, for example, evaporates at temperatures as low as -45o F. As the temperature rises, the rate of evaporation increases and more and more vapors are given off. This is also true for other flammable liquids, except that the temperature at which they give off vapors varies with the kind of liquid.

### Common Sense Rules to Follow

If we remember a few common sense rules when storing, handling and using flammable liquids, we can help prevent the job, or people, from going up in flames.

- Keep flammable liquids away from open flames and sparks. This means that you should never smoke around flammable liquids.
- Always use approved metal safety cans or the original manufacturer's container to store flammable liquids. Keep the containers closed when not in use and never store them near exits or passageways.
- Practice good housekeeping in flammable liquid storage areas. Clean up spills immediately and then place the rags in a tightly closed metal container.
- Be careful to not spill a flammable liquid on yourself. Not only could it burn you if it catches fire, but it could cause painful skin irritation that could easily become infected. If you do spill a flammable liquid on yourself, wash it off as soon as you can.
- Never try to boost a fire with a flammable liquid. You are in for trouble if the fire flares up.

### Don't trust your nose - Ventilate!

Do not trust your nose to tell you whether an area or container contains hazardous or dangerous vapors. Not all dangerous liquids give off vapors that you can smell. Some vapors are poisonous, as well as flammable. Use flammable liquids only where there is plenty of ventilation.

Vapors given off by flammable liquids are usually heavier than air and collect in the lowest area they can reach. Without good ventilation to dissipate them, you have a potential disaster awaiting that one small spark can set off.

### Pay attention to the label

Carefully read the manufacturer's label on the container of any flammable liquid before using it.

## Good or bad?

Like many other hazardous substances, flammable liquids can make a good friend or a bad enemy, depending on how you use them. Whether at home or on the job, treat flammable liquids with respect and use them for the purposes for which they were intended.

Anyone have a question or comment about Flammable Liquids? Please be sure to sign-in on the training certification form.

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